

“WORDS THAT NEVER GO AWAY”

Amos 7:7-17

July 13, 2025

Several years ago I met a young man who worked as an engineer. His job was doing inspections at **construction sites**. Specifically, he tested the cement quality of roadwork. This was an important job, because if the cement wasn't mixed with the proper consistency and ingredients, then the road would not hold up under pressure. Inspecting the quality of the roads was a vital task, but I'm quite sure he made the contractors nervous. If this young man came back with a negative test, they had to tear up the road and begin again. This would cost the contractors time and money. Needless to say, he was not a popular man.

I imagine the same feelings were expressed toward the Old Testament prophets. Nobody wanted them around. Amaziah, the high priest at the Bethel sanctuary tells the prophet Amos, **“O seer, go, flee away to the land of Judah, earn your bread there, and prophesy there, but never again prophesy at Bethel...”**

Wow, talk about rejection! I may have preached a few sermons people didn't like, but to be told to leave town. What is it about the prophets that caused such a reaction? For one thing they spoke words that people did not want to hear. Now that alone isn't enough to get rejected. I mean we hear words all the time we don't want to hear. Every time a commercial comes on I hit the mute button because I am not buying nor interested in most the stuff people are selling. Besides advertising we are hit with a thousand different messages and opinions every day from our

multimedia sources, most of which we ignore and certainly don't take to heart. So what is it about the prophet's words that caused such animosity?

They spoke a truth that threatened the powers that be. The prophets exposed the hypocrisy that people were hiding behind. They were not afraid to speak to those in power, not only exposing their dirty little secrets, lies, and abuses, but most especially, the prophets stated there would be consequences for their actions. God sees what you are doing and holds you accountable. Which usually meant the leaders would fall from power. Who wants to hear that?

What made the prophet's messages so memorable is they would often use visual aids. Take this morning's scripture for example. Amos writes, **"This is what he showed me, the Lord was standing beside a wall built with a plumb line, with a plumb line in his hand. And the Lord said to me, 'Amos, what do you see?' And I said, 'A plumb line.'"**

The plumb bob, is one of the oldest and simplest tools, dating back to ancient Egypt around 3,000 BCE. There is evidence of its use in the construction of the pyramids. The basic design is a pointed weight suspended from a string. The plumb bob was used to make sure that a wall was vertical, very important in construction. If the blocks were off kilter the wall could collapse. The taller the building the more important everything stacked true.

I. WORDS WE NEED TO HEAR

Everyone in Israel was familiar with a plumb bob, what it was and what it was used for. Then the Lord said, **“See, I am setting a plumb line in the midst of my people Israel; I will spare them no longer; the high places of Isaac shall be made desolate, and the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid waste, and I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword.”**

Amos uses the plumb bob vision and tells the people that God has found the people of Israel off kilter, a crooked wall, and their sins an offense. In earlier words Amos gives some specifics including: dishonest merchants, abuse of the poor, court decisions being bought and sold, corruption in the priesthood, and, of course, idolatry.

Amos spoke words the people needed to hear with the hope they would repent and change their ways. Amos warned that unless the people repented, they would suffer God’s wrath. But, the people ignored him. In his final visions, Amos declares it is too late. The people are so far out of plumb they are ready to topple over. In 722 BCE, the Assyrian army wiped out the northern kingdom of Israel.

A few months ago I bought some water stones for sharpening our **kitchen knives**. Please don’t ask me to sharpen your knives because I am not good at it. I only know that a dull knife makes cutting tomatoes a mess. The way a knife gets sharp is by taking some of its metal away and reangling the edge, so the knife becomes an effective, useful tool.

One of the lessons we learn from Amos is that there are words we need to hear. Specifically, we need to hear the words of Jesus. He is our plumbline; it is by his life we are measured. One of the purposes of scripture reading is it tests our lives. It reveals our shortcomings, our character flaws, and our blind spots. The Holy Spirit works through the words of scripture to plow up the hard spots in our hearts, to plant seeds of the kingdom, and to sharpen us into a people who are effective workers in the Kingdom of God.

But we need to hear the words for this process to take place. This is not always comfortable, but our edges need to be grinded down to be useful to God.

II. ANSWER THE CALL

Sometimes I find it strange to see everyone with a cellphone. Like many of you, I grew up in house with one beige telephone that hung on the kitchen wall. It had a long cord attached to a ear and speaking piece. You certainly couldn't put it in your pocket.

In our house, answering the phone was a kind of competition. When the phone rang, my siblings race to see who could pick it up first, even though it usually wasn't for any of us. We would have to call out, "Mom, the phone is for you." At that time there was no call waiting, answering machine, call forwarding, text message, or email. People called and you answered.

Then Amose answered Amaziah, “I am no prophet nor a prophet’s son, but I am a herdsman and a dresser of sycamore trees, and the Lord took me from following the flock, and the Lord said to me, ‘Go, prophesy to my people of Israel.’”

This is one of the few passages in the bible that we catch a glimpse of a minor prophet’s background story. Very little is known about most of them, but here we discover the trade of Amos. He was shepherd – cattle, sheep, goats and he had a second trade of **pruning the sycamore trees**. These trees provided shade and a fig fruit. I imagine Amos was a happy little shepherd and farmer and then he got a call. More importantly, he answered the call.

Being a prophet was not his life dream. He was not a trained prophet like they produced in the religious centers of Bethel. Amos did not grow up in their traditions, did not choose to be a prophet, did not go to school of a prophet, nor was it part of his family heritage. He was from the southern kingdom of Judea, which was hostile to Israel where he was sent.

But God choose him. God called and said, **“Go, prophesy to my people Israel.”** And Amos answered the call. Are we answering God’s call to us? That doesn’t mean we need to be clergy or a prophet. We may be called to serve in a soup kitchen, or help build a home for a family in need, or start a prison ministry, or grow a community garden, or help senior citizens with their taxes, or...you can fill in the blank. I believe if

we are followers of Jesus Christ, then God has called us. Are we answering the call?

We are not always called because of our education, experience, or expertise. Like Amos we might be sent to places and people we know little about and are not comfortable with, and may not even want us there. Sometimes we will begin with nothing but a tug of the Spirit and a faith in God. Answer the call, anyway, trusting that God will provide. This is what Amos did and countless disciples after him.

III. WORDS WE NEED TO SPEAK

A few moments ago I said there are words we need to hear. But there are **also words we need to speak**. After the kingdom of David split in two The Northern Tribes Israel, the Southern tribes Judah. King Jeroboam I reorganized Israel. He founded the sanctuaries of Bethel and Dan to compete with the Temple in Jerusalem. But it was a perverted version. The king had golden calves made, rejected the Levitical priesthood, and offered sacrifices to himself. Most significantly, he consolidated the political and religious powers under his authority thus creating a state religion. The shrine at Bethel was the sanctuary of the King.

Amaziah was the head priest of that sanctuary. His salary was paid by the state. He was in power because he was appointed by the king. So whose interests do you think he is going to support? Amaziah didn't get where he was without playing politics. His messages promoted the king's agenda, not God's. When the prophet Amos begins to speak his message

of truth, judgment, and the impending fall of Israel, we can understand Amaziah's reaction. Be gone, seer, and don't come back. Amaziah is not concerned with the truth or the prophecies, but only maintaining the status quo, keeping everything decent and in order at the Bethel cult center.

But there are words we need to speak. We are in real danger as a church when we no longer speak the truth, about sin, about corruption, about choices we and our government make. The Church isn't here to run the government, but to serve as its conscious. When we buy into corrupt systems there will be consequences.

When we no longer have compassion for poor, those living in poverty, those who have no access to healthcare, those who are hungry, homeless, imprisoned, alien, and we take advantage in the name of the dollar, we have left Jesus Christ. And there will be consequences. God is not mocked. The plumb line is hanging. There are words we need to speak.

Several years ago, a psychologist named **Henry Link** was led through his study of human behavior and psychology to give up Christianity as an outdated superstition. In working with his patients, however, he found that often, as he tried to help them unsnarl tangled lives and bad years, he needed to be able to give them something to love outside of themselves. The only permanent thing he could give them was God, and Dr. Link soon found that he had talked himself back into being a Christian.

There are times when we are called to be the mouthpiece for God. You don't have to be a minister. We all have the power to speak words of comfort, words of guidance, words of encouragement, words of wisdom, words of hope, and sometimes words of critique and judgment. There are words we need to speak, but listen first to the Holy Spirit and make sure you are walking with Christ and not speaking from your own ego needs. The Church is called to have faith to speak the words of God.

In an article called Once a Millennium, Bob Hulteen wrote, "Within the Christian tradition, rarely is a concept more misunderstood than prophecy. Unfortunately, this misinterpretation wreaks havoc on our society in the form of doomsday soothsayers, apocalyptic dreamers and militant revolutionaries.

The crux of the misunderstanding is this: Prophecy is not the result of seeing into the future. Instead, prophecy is the faithful declaration of the implications of current actions on the future, with the hope of having an impact on both."

There are words we need to hear, there are calls we need to answer, and there are words we need to speak that we might impact our current actions and the future. Perhaps, there is a little bit of prophet in us all. Amen.

First Presbyterian Church in Hawley
Sunday, July 13, 2025
Second Scripture Lesson

Amos 7:7-17

⁷Thus he shewed me: and, behold, the LORD stood upon a wall made by a plumbline, with a plumbline in his hand.

⁸And the LORD said unto me, Amos, what seest thou? And I said, A plumbline. Then said the LORD, Behold, I will set a plumbline in the midst of my people Israel: I will not again pass by them any more:

⁹And the high places of Isaac shall be desolate, and the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid waste; and I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword.

¹⁰Then Amaziah the priest of Bethel sent to Jeroboam king of Israel, saying, Amos hath conspired against thee in the midst of the house of Israel: the land is not able to bear all his words.

¹¹For thus Amos saith, Jeroboam shall die by the sword, and Israel shall surely be led away captive out of their own land.

¹²Also Amaziah said unto Amos, O thou seer, go, flee thee away into the land of Judah, and there eat bread, and prophesy there:

¹³But prophesy not again any more at Bethel: for it is the king's chapel, and it is the king's court.

¹⁴Then answered Amos, and said to Amaziah, I was no prophet, neither was I a prophet's son; but I was an herdman, and a gatherer of sycomore fruit:

¹⁵And the LORD took me as I followed the flock, and the LORD said unto me, Go, prophesy unto my people Israel.

¹⁶Now therefore hear thou the word of the LORD: Thou sayest, Prophesy not against Israel, and drop not thy word against the house of Isaac.

¹⁷Therefore thus saith the LORD; Thy wife shall be an harlot in the city, and thy sons and thy daughters shall fall by the sword, and thy land shall be divided by line; and thou shalt die in a polluted land: and Israel shall surely go into captivity forth of his land.

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be To God.