

September 18, 2016

#### PRAYER

Let the words of my mouth be mediations to our hearts, be always acceptable unto thee. Oh Lord, our strength and our redeemer. AMEN

#### SERMON

If you've been attending St. Jude's for the last few weeks, a few weeks ago you heard me lament that the readings from the gospel had some very harsh words coming from Jesus. I try to preach and to teach and explain that it was necessary for Jesus to use such language to show how important his message was for the people. How important it was for them to hear that the gospel that he was proclaiming. That the Kingdom of God was so important that this change that he had brought into the world needed their full attention, needed to be first and foremost, above all else, above family, above friends, above loved ones. And that's why he used such strong language. Even though it's hard for us to hear sometimes coming from Jesus. Last week we got back to the parables. The parables are a lot nice. I like parables. Parables have a lot in them but they are a little more gentle for our ears to hear. And then I read the readings for this Sunday. Again we have a parable. This is my least favorite parable. Not terribly long ago, a year or two, I preached on another version of this same parable. I hope you were here for that because I'm going to preach on the Old Testament and the Epistle. Sorry if you were expecting something on this, it's just not going to happen. Partly because when I read Amos and she went to Sunday school didn't she? I was so glad that she switched to Amos because a lot of the sermon has to do with Amos and not about Jeremiah.

This morning when Doug Smith was reading the lesson he said that he didn't know anything about Amos when he first looked up the reading. And so he looked up to see who Amos was and one of the interesting things he said about Amos was that he was not a professional prophet. There were those at the time but Amos was a farmer. He had herds. God's word came to him and he was compelled to go and share that word of God to the people. That's what a prophet really is not a future teller but a spokesperson for God. To say what God thinks about what's going on. And many times, most times, almost all the time the words that the prophet had to say were not the words that the people wanted to hear. The words that the prophet had to say came when God was displeased with what was going on with his chosen people, the people that he has chosen out of all the world to reflect who God is. So that others might come and know and understand God. The one true God. That was part of the covenant. I will be your God. You will be my people. You will live according to the laws and the commandments that I give you and others will see that. And others will see how you live and they will be drawn to God.

Unfortunately, especially in times of prosperity, when things were going really well for the people of Israel that's when they began to forget about God. Not completely. They would still read the laws and they knew that the laws had sway over how they lived their lives. But they began to get away with as much as they possibly could. And they took less interest in the people that they were taking advantage of. That's part of the message that Amos had for the people. It was about social justice or social injustice depending on how you look at it. And he tells the people that God is unhappy. That they just can't wait for the sadness to be over so that they can open up their shops, so that they can make more money. So that they can sell the things that they have. They can't wait to have people so poor that they can buy them for a pair of sandals. They are interested only in themselves and having the resources for

themselves and if it takes using people to get that, well that was okay, that wasn't exactly a breaking of the laws. Sure they were called to not only care for their own people who are the people of the covenant. But they were also called to care for the soldier or the traveler, or the people that would come and kind of like it there and stay there but they weren't really Jews. But they began taking advantage of these people.

And as long as they were enriching themselves with resources, they felt that that was okay when it talked about the ethyl being small and the shackle gray, he was saying you guys are short changing people just so that you can have more. Said, people of God are better than that. Chosen people of God are called to more than that. You are called to respect people. God is giving you the resources. God is giving you the ability to grow the crops, to have the flocks, but you're supposed to be taking care of one another. That's what this whole thing is about, to be the people of God. And when you start focusing on the wealth, you stop serving God and you're serving yourself. And God is displeased with that. That was the message that Amos had for the people. They didn't like that message very much. None of us like to be chastised especially when it comes from God. But that was God's word to his people. Stop! Remember who you are! Remember who you are called to be! To care about one another, to treat each other with integrity, with justice, with mercy. Not to take advantage of someone else's plight whose just clawing out of an existence. Don't take advantage of that.

I read that and I almost immediately thought of a quote that I heard from one of the corporate CEOs. He said that if our company is doing well and making a profit, we are under no obligation to share that with our workers. And what came to me is there's a difference between legality and morality. Legally he was absolutely right. He can use people who are willing to be used or have to be willing to be used because they just have to have some kind of a job. And they're doing the best they can to provide a home, provide for themselves, provide for their families. And he was absolutely right, he is in no legal obligation as he gets richer and richer to share that with the people on whose backs he is getting rich. Morally its reprehensible. Morally if he is benefitting from the hard work of the people that he has hired. He is obligated to share that. How rich does one have to be, that you have to make the poor poorer?

I believe that there is just too much of that in the world and too much of that in our country. And I think it represents exactly what Jesus said at the end of the reading today. That you can't serve God and wealth. Now that doesn't mean you can't have wealth. There are a lot of Godly people who are rich people but they share that wealth that they have been entrusted with. They honor God with it. They share it with those who help them become the wealthy person that they are. I've seen it and I'm sure you've seen it. It is what we are to be about. To be stewards of what God has placed in our hands. To be able to help those who need the help. Not handouts, but to pay those who labor for us so that they can live like us.

Social justice not helping those or handing out to those who refuse to work but for those who are working to make it so that they can have a life. Isn't that what we are to be about? Isn't that part of the message here? That we as a people of God are not strictly limited to the legalities but are held to the morality of having some kind of equity. To share the blessings that, we have been given.

In the letter that Paul wrote to Timothy, in that portion that was read today, Paul is talking about praying, having intercessions for everyone. Everyone is included. But he points out that our leaders, the kings, the leaders they need our prayers. We should hold them up so that they can help lead us to

prosperity and peace. That Jesus came not for few but for all. That he came and brought a gospel of salvation not to a few but to all. That Jesus himself was human and stands as an intercessor. Because of what he done in his life, death, and resurrection. He stands for us all. So that we can know the truth, so that we can know the gospel, so that we can know have life and share it with one another. So that we are not bound up and afraid to share what God has given to us. That's what we are about as the church. Recognizing that the gospel is for us all. That life is for us all. That some have been blessed with resources but not to withhold it from others but to honor God by sharing with those who don't have enough. So that we can live life and live it joyfully. Not constrained to work seven days a week, twelve hours a day just so that we can put a roof over our heads. So that we can have just enough to eat for the day. But so that we can have a joyful life.

In our country, we're in a time where we're getting ready to elect our leaders. And believe me when I say, every one of them needs our prayers. Too many times I've heard people who they disagree with this leader or that leader or this party or that party. They just, you know, as far as they're concerned they could fall off the end of the earth and the earth would be better for it. I don't think that is what God is calling us to. Matter of fact, if the people that are elected are people that I disagree with I'm going to pray harder for them. Because goodness knows, they need it. They need to have their hearts opened to the welfare of all people. They need to have a vision where everybody does well. Where all people have opportunities, where we're not buying the poor for a pair of sandals. Where we're not sweeping up the drags of the week to sell even more so that I can have more and not concerned for the one who is buying the drags. It needs to be in our hearts and our minds as we select our leaders. It's interesting to me that at this point in our history of this nation, there is less approval rating and respect for the leaders in Congress than any time in history. And one would think that this election cycle would mean that there be a huge turnover. I'm guessing that's not going to happen because the ones that the people are thinking about when they said I'm not happy with Congress is everybody else's representative not their own. Not all, but enough to get them re-elected. We need to pray for our leaders. We need to pray for our country. But we need to pray that hearts will be opened to the gospel of Jesus Christ. That people stop serving wealth in order to serve God first. And let the wealth take care of itself because when our hearts are open to God, when our decisions are based on where God is leading us. Then there is justice, then there is mercy, then there is blessing for everyone. May those blessings come to us, come to all people because God's love comes to all people.