

## eLectionary Readings Discussion for Sunday, July 11, 2010

A Ministry of Christ the Redeemer Church, San Marcos, Texas

### Measuring Up

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This week's Lectionary readings:

Amos 7:7-17

[Psalm 82](#)

Colossians 1:1-14

Luke 10:25-37

### Amos 7:7-17

***This is what the Lord God 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." Then the Lord said,***

***"See, I am setting a plumb line in the midst of my people Israel; I will never again pass them by;  
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."***

***Then Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, sent to King Jeroboam of Israel, saying, "Amos has conspired against you in the very center of the house of Israel; the land is not able to bear all his words. For thus Amos has said,***

***`Jeroboam shall die by the sword,  
and Israel must go into exile  
away from his land.'"***

***And Amaziah said to Amos, "O seer, go, flee away to the land of Judah, earn your bread there, and prophesy there; but never again prophesy at Bethel, for it is the king's sanctuary, and it is a temple of the kingdom."***

***Then Amos 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 Israel.'***

***"Now therefore hear the word of the LORD.  
You say, 'Do not prophesy against Israel,  
and do not preach against the house of Isaac.'  
Therefore thus says the LORD:  
'Your wife shall become a prostitute in the city,  
and your sons and your daughters shall fall by the sword,  
and your land shall be parceled out by line;  
you yourself shall die in an unclean land,  
and Israel shall surely go into exile away from its land.'"***

How do we “measure up”? Amos lived in Judah, the “Southern Kingdom”, but was sent to prophesy to the “Northern Kingdom”. Both Judah to the south and Israel to the north were experiencing prosperity so great that they became “self-assured” and smug about their “being in God’s good graces.” Does this sound like any nation you can name? Scripture is full of references to building. Christ’s earthly “father” was Joseph, a “teckton” (Greek?) which could be roughly translated as a “handyman”. (I know, you have always been told that Joseph was a “Jewish CARPENTER” but that has little real evidence despite Hollywood’s depictions.) Any way you slice it, this story is about “measuring up to a standard”. I helped build three Habitat for Humanity homes in San Marcos over the years. One of the tasks to which I was assigned was to walk around with a tape measure, a square and a level to make sure that the framing “measured up” to the blueprints. It is almost impossible to hang sheetrock on walls that are not plumb and square. Yes, even Habitat houses must pass city inspectors. (One Saturday, I had a wonderful group of “amateur” but well-motivated college girls show up to help “hammer nails”. It was quickly obvious that NONE of them had any experience driving nails. I took the whole group out to the storage shed where we held a “nail-driving school”. At the end of the day, they were GREAT at driving nails and I was their proud “teacher”. I was reminded that “when the student is ready, the teacher will appear.”) Often, we attempt to teach others with “poor tools” and we end up doing more harm than good as we transmit our “facts” as “gospel”. The foundation of a “good building” must START out plumb and square or the work is twice as hard and almost impossible to correct. According to what Amos “received from God”, the Israelites had failed to “measure up” to the “plumb line” standard that God had for His people. Because of their failure, the land was to become desolate and their lives thrown into disarray. “Beth-el” means “The House of God”. (Remember that anytime you see “el” in Hebrew, think “God”.) Amos was only a “trimmer of sycamore trees” and a herdsman when God “called him” to prophesy to Israel. His prophesy caused him nothing but grief. People often have a difficult time accepting truth and blame the “messenger”. The “problem” with prophesy is that they often come true. Israel did not listen to Amos. Amaziah and the Israelites suffered just as Amos had envisioned. Are modern prophets who predict the demise of current nations without validity? Is it too late? Only time will tell.

## **Psalm 82**

*Deus stetit*

1

**God takes his stand in the council of heaven; \*  
he gives judgment in the midst of the gods:**

2

**"How long will you judge unjustly, \*  
and show favor to the wicked?**

3

**Save the weak and the orphan; \*  
defend the humble and needy;**

4

**Rescue the weak and the poor; \*  
deliver them from the power of the wicked.**

5

**They do not know, neither do they understand;  
they go about in darkness; \*  
all the foundations of the earth are shaken.**

6

**Now I say to you, 'You are gods, \*  
and all of you children of the Most High;**

7

**Nevertheless, you shall die like mortals, \*  
and fall like any prince."**

8

**Arise, O God, and RULE the earth, \*  
for you shall take all nations for your own.**

Have you ever wondered why a "twelve inch measure" is called a "RULER"? Is a "Ruler" (a superior, a king, a sovereign) a "measurer"? Does a "ruler" set the standard of behavior and obedience? Christians are supposed to be those who have ELECTED to be under God's sovereignty. How are WE measuring up to the standards which are set by our "Sovereign"? To be "under the sovereignty of God" is to be under God's "standards". What are the standards set down for "measuring" our obedience and "hewing to the line" of God's principles? "Respect God and keep His commandments for, this is the WHOLE duty of mankind." (Bert Cobb's translation of scripture) IF we "respect" God's sovereignty and love others as we want to be loved, we become "plumb" and "square" with God's commandments and "good and faithful servants" which establishes a healthy relationship between each of us and our Father. God, make it so.

## **Colossians 1:1-14**

***Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother,***

***To the saints and faithful brothers and sisters in Christ in Colossae:***

***Grace to you and peace from God our Father.***

***In our prayers for you we always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, for we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. You have heard of this hope before in the word of the truth, the gospel that has come to you. Just as it is bearing fruit and growing in the whole world, so it has been bearing fruit among yourselves from the day you heard it and truly comprehended the grace of God. This you learned from Epaphras, our beloved fellow servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf, and he has made known to us your love in the Spirit.***

***For this reason, since the day we heard it, we have not ceased praying for you and asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you may lead lives worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, as you bear fruit in every good work and as you grow in the knowledge of God. May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.***

Paul was quite the verbal acrobat. Note the underlined “theme words” in the passage from Colossians cited above. The “body” of the passage starts with “thanking God” (gratitude), ties in LOVE and HOPE, the GRACE OF GOD, servanthood, ministry and ends with “LOVE IN THE SPIRIT”. Paul touched on most of the important “themes” of his letters in one paragraph. That is true economy of words and the words are easily understood. The last paragraph is a love letter to the Colossians that is a written prayer for Paul’s “children in the Lord” that is JOYOUS and full of HOPE. It is a paragraph that a loving parent might send to children for which the “father” is proud and grateful. Could Paul write such a lovely prayer for US? God, make it so.

## **Luke 10:25-37**

***Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" He answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." And he said to him, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live."***

***But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.' Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."***

Some attorneys receive a JD degree which stands for "Juris Doctor" which means "Juris" (law) "Doctor" (teacher) ergo; an attorney should be a "teacher of the law". (The irony is that we cannot "teach what we do not understand".) In Bible times, a "lawyer" was a "teacher of the Jewish Law". The problem with translating scripture is that a lot of the humor, sarcasm and irony are "lost in translation". The lawyer's question drips with sarcasm: "TEACHER, (Rabbi) what must I DO to inherit eternal life?" Sensing the "trap", Jesus answered his question with a question. "Okay, smarty-pants, what do YOU TEACH others that scripture says in answer to your question?" The lawyer obviously KNEW THE FACTS of the Law but, failed to understand the SPIRIT of the Law. The lawyer's robotic retort was the "standard" he learned through rote: "***You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.***" Jesus said, in essence, "You have answered your own question. Now, go DO THAT and YOU WILL LIVE." Case closed. The lawyer was not wise so he continued to "test" Jesus as though he were in "court". He should have shut up and gone home. But, no...

Knowing that he could not “live up to the scriptural ‘standard’” he “taught” to everyone else, the lawyer tried to JUSTIFY HIMSELF (change the “rules” to make himself the “standard”). (I’ve tried this and it NEVER works. It is the equivalent to our children’s saying, “Well, EVERYONES doing it.” We think God has never heard this before?) Hah! He was hoisted on his own petard. (A petard is a type of lance with a sharp point upon which ancients hoisted the body or body parts of their “victims” for public derision.) The lawyer asked “And who **IS** my NEIGHBOR?” (“It depends on what the meaning of “is” is.” Just another present-day “lawyer’s” attempt to play on words.) Jesus replied to the question with the Parable of the Good Samaritan. This was a SHARP ridicule of the haughty Jewish “elite” because they did not consider the inhabitants of Samaria as “true Jews” after their return from captivity. Jesus purposely used the “epitome of sinful people” (a Samaritan) as the “standard” of Godly action. Jesus even used the “Jewish Elite” as the “bad example” in the parable. I wonder if the by-standers to this parable’s telling saw the humor, irony and sarcasm of Jesus. After his telling of this well-known parable, Jesus asked the lawyer, “Which of these three, DO YOU THINK, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?” Once again, the petard was driven even deeper into the lawyer as he replied (gulp), ***“The one who showed him mercy.”*** (The elitist lawyer was not about to even say the word “Samaritan”.) Again, the answer “nailed” the lawyer who tried to “test” Jesus: “Go and DO LIKEWISE, that is, SHOW MERCY TO EVERYONE because everyone is your neighbor.” There is little “wiggle room” in God’s standard. How do we measure up to God’s RULER? As “children of God” we act like two-year-olds and “test the limits” FREQUENTLY. So, how’s that working for us? It all depends on our ATTITUDE toward the sovereignty of God and our willingness to meld our will to the will of the Father. **God, let us do likewise and live.**