

Sermon 10th July

[Amos 7:7-17; Psalm 82; Colossians 1:1-14; Luke 10:25-37](#)

Do you remember that famous speech by The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. on August 28, 1963? It was his “I Have a Dream” speech in which he called for civil rights and economic protections for all people, and decried the systemic racism and violence that haunted the America of his day.

In articulating his vision for a peaceful society that moves away from racism and embraces unity and harmony, King declared, **“No, no, we are not satisfied and will not be satisfied until justice rolls down like water and righteousness like a mighty stream.”**

He was recalling the words of the ancient prophet Amos who first wrote (5.24), **“Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like a mighty stream.”** Just a couple of chapters before today’s reading. Amos unleashed a tirade against Israel, whose people were suffocating under the weight of systemic injustice and rampant violence. He lambasted the rich and powerful elite who had amassed their position by standing on the necks of the poor, he called out a litany of their sins: unfair lending practices, unsustainable agricultural and environmental policy, and gross income inequality – issues that continue to plague our world community today.

The people of Israel were exposed to all that they had conveniently ignored for so long, and they didn’t like it! Amos was banished from the royal chapel and sent back to his home in Judah. One can’t help but wonder how long Amos and other like-minded prophets would survive in the modern pulpit, but truth be told, Amos presents a pastoral paradox that every preacher knows all too well: on one hand, the Gospel message bears an unyielding, uncompromising truth. But on the other hand, the sheer force with which it is proclaimed often proves too harsh to hear for the people who need to hear it the most. As a result, Christians have become accustomed to being soothed on Sunday morning with a feel-good message that portrays God as little more than a Divine “fixer,” taking our failings and jagged edges, and smoothing them over into something sublime and holy. “God works all things for good,” we say.

Amos proclaimed that God's patience with recalcitrant and hard-hearted people has come to an end. God has set the plumb line in the midst of Israel, and instead of finding an even plane of justice and righteousness, God has found Israel to be angled against the poor and the helpless, and so God summoned Amos to stand and proclaim judgment against Israel.

“...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 challenged the *status quo*, demanded justice at the expense of economic gain, and held up faithfulness in the face of the people's fickle nature.

But don't miss the point how the plumb line is used in building which provides for the undercurrent of hope beneath Amos' prophecy: God, you see, lays the foundation for reconstruction.

We have our own prophets of doom today! Our news media often paints a rather depressing picture of human nature, incurably bent on war, destruction, social and political injustice, and on all types and forms of immorality. That, of course, is what is seen as making news. But it should blind none of us from being more aware in our daily lives of the basic goodness of human nature, and of noting the many selfless and quite unnoticed acts of love and charity. Therein lies the foundation of hope.

By being positive about our human nature and its capabilities for good, we become more aware of our own potential to love selflessly. This is what Jesus wants the lawyer to experience. Instead of giving him a definition of “neighbour,” he presents him with the example of a Samaritan who acts not out of a sense of duty or of guilt, but out of kindness and generosity. We can hope that the lawyer was fired with enthusiasm to live in a similar manner.

One could concentrate on the negative elements of the parable, the brigands, the priest and the Levite. But this would be to miss the point, and we end up falling into the trap of the press and the media. The emphasis in

the parable is on the positive capabilities of human nature even in people not normally expected to display such characteristics.

This too is the overall thrust of the Old Testament book of Deuteronomy. Quite often, as Christians, we approach this book of the with a certain lack of enthusiasm, noting its negative stipulations and its prohibitions. Yet to concentrate on this aspect would again lead to distortion. For Deuteronomy, expressed as a summary of Moses' instructions, is God's teaching to Israel on how to live a life of love and charity. Deuteronomy repeatedly stresses God's undying and unchanging love for his people, and from this perspective urges its hearers to respond in kind: they are to live a life of love for God and for their neighbour, defined above all by the trio of the stranger, the widow, and the orphan.

These were the people most in need of charity in the community of Israel, and the idea is that, if one is charitable to them, then one is charitable to all without exception.

Sometimes we Christians get impatient with ourselves that we are not always living out the life of love, feeling that the Priest and the Levite are still within us. Our impatience is stoked up by the commercialised society we live in, always demanding quick results. We are conditioned by advertising techniques: we expect that fast foods will not only be fast but nutritious, and so on. Perfection in love is usually not so instant. It's well to remember that the guidance in Deuteronomy was given while still on the way to the Promised Land, and that the parable of the Lord is told while the disciples are still making their way with him to Jerusalem.

The "journey" element can remind us that love and charity are part of the journey of faith. And, as with many journeys, there are stops and even wrong turnings. It is when we get bogged down at such stages that we lose our sense of direction and our infinite capacity to love.

Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem to face a trial by people who did not like him because he threatened their authority and they were planning to get rid of him. This of course lay very heavy on Jesus' heart, and then he met that young lawyer. Faced with his own death, Jesus tell the story of the Good

Samaritan - a story about Love; these two stories are tied and held together with a LOVE that is so strong that Jesus gave himself up for every one of us so that we might live a life free from the bondage of sin.

Who is going to show Mercy on Jesus in his time of need? We are, because we can do no less than to share this love every single day with our neighbours. Every good deed that we do must be filled with God's love for us; every act that we perform must also be filled with God's love, and if it is not, then we are performing the act for selfish reasons just Amos charges the Israelites of his day

We are inspired to use the plump line to guide us in building a strong faithful relationship with God. We are encouraged to show compassion, love and mercy to everyone so that we will inherit eternal life. We are fed with the food of forgiveness and love which strengthens us and gives us the courage to face life's challenges. We learn to be open to hearing God's call as we follow what the Spirit is telling us; and then we are sent out filled with God's Love and Peace to sustain us until we gather again.