

Sunday, October 10, 2021
Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost
Reflections by Juel Pierce

First Reading

Amos 5:6-7, 10-15

Amos was a herdsman by profession and a prophet by God's call. During a time of great prosperity in the northern kingdom of Israel, the prophet speaks to the wealthy upper class. He warns his listeners that fulfilling God's demand for justice brings blessing, while corruption and oppression incur God's wrath.

⁶Seek the LORD and live,
or he will break out against the house of Joseph like fire,
and it will devour Bethel, with no one to quench it.

⁷Ah, you that turn justice to wormwood,
and bring righteousness to the ground!

¹⁰They hate the one who reproves in the gate,
and they abhor the one who speaks the truth.

¹¹Therefore because you trample on the poor
and take from them levies of grain,
you have built houses of hewn stone,
but you shall not live in them;
you have planted pleasant vineyards,
but you shall not drink their wine.

¹²For I know how many are your transgressions,
and how great are your sins—
you who afflict the righteous, who take a bribe,
and push aside the needy in the gate.

¹³Therefore the prudent will keep silent in such a time;
for it is an evil time.

¹⁴Seek good and not evil,
that you may live;
and so the LORD, the God of hosts, will be with you,
just as you have said.

¹⁵Hate evil and love good,
and establish justice in the gate;
it may be that the LORD, the God of hosts,
will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph.

Text Questions

What does Amos call on the people to do, particularly the rulers, the wealthy, and business owners, judges and lawyers? (verse 6) What will happen if they ignore Amos? What does Amos accuse them of doing? (verse 7) Note: wormwood is a bitter-tasting plant symbolizing sorrow and bitterness. The legal proceedings often happened at the gate to the city, which was sort of like our courthouse. Who “reproves” and “speaks the truth” in a legal proceeding? (verse 10) What do those legal proceedings do, according to Amos? (verse 11) What do the wealthy do with the money, grain, etc. that they get from the ones they sue? What will happen to their proceeds? Apparently, those who cheated thought God would not notice what they were doing. What does God say about that, through Amos? (verse 12) Have you ever thought it is prudent to keep silent in a time of injustice? (verse 13) What does Amos tell them to do? (verses 14-15) In verse 6, Amos speaks about how God will destroy “the house of Joseph.” Who is the house of Joseph? In verse 15, Amos says that if they do what God wants, it may be that God will be gracious to “the remnant of Joseph.” This movement from “the house of Joseph” to “the remnant of Joseph” does not sound as though Amos is hopeful that people will listen to God, does it?

Psalm 90:12-17

So teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts to wisdom. (Ps. 90:12)

- ¹²So teach us to number our days
that we may apply our hearts to wisdom.
- ¹³Return, O LORD; how long will you tarry?
Be gracious to your servants.
- ¹⁴Satisfy us by your steadfast love in the morning;
so shall we rejoice and be glad all our days.
- ¹⁵Make us glad as many days as you afflicted us
and as many years as we suffered adversity.
- ¹⁶Show your servants your works,
and your splendor to their children.
- ¹⁷May the graciousness of the Lord our God be upon us;
prosper the work of our hands; prosper our handiwork.

Text Questions

The psalmist may be praying for “the remnant” that is left. If you read the beginning of the psalm (especially verses 7-11), it sounds as though they know God is angry with them. What do they promise to do if they listen to God? (verse 12) Has God answered them yet? (verse 13) What do they pray for? (verses 14-15) They have been “afflicted” for a long time. What do they ask for in relief? Do you think we have to look for God’s “works” and “splendor”? What might make them seem hidden from us? What, in the end, do they pray for? (verse 17) Have you experienced God’s graciousness?

Second Reading

Hebrews 4:12-16

We cannot hide our thoughts, desires, and actions from God, to whom we are completely accountable. Nevertheless, Jesus understands our human weakness and temptations, because he also experienced them. Therefore we can approach the throne of grace to receive divine mercy from Christ.

¹²Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. ¹³And before him no creature is hidden, but all are naked and laid bare to the eyes of the one to whom we must render an account.

¹⁴Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession. ¹⁵For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Text Questions

What does the writer of Hebrews say about the word of God? Is it always pleasant? (verse 12) What do you think of when you know that God is able to judge all your thoughts and intentions? Can anything be hidden from God? (verse 13) What does God see about us? Who is our “great high priest”? (verse 14) If we are afraid that God judges us according to God’s divine standard, how does Jesus reassure us? (verse 15) When you think of Jesus’ who has been tested in every respect as we are tested, how might that help when we think of our sins? (verse 15) What is the difference

between Jesus and us? Even though Jesus is without sin, how does he help us? (verse 16)

Gospel

Mark 10:17-31

Jesus has been teaching his disciples about what is most valued in God's eyes. Now, a conversation with a rich man brings his message home to the disciples in a way that is surprising but unforgettable.

¹⁷As [Jesus] was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" ¹⁸Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. ¹⁹You know the commandments: 'You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud; Honor your father and mother.'" ²⁰He said to him, "Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth." ²¹Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, "You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me." ²²When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.

²³Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!" ²⁴And the disciples were perplexed at these words. But Jesus said to them again, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! ²⁵It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God." ²⁶They were greatly astounded and said to one another, "Then who can be saved?" ²⁷Jesus looked at them and said, "For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible."

²⁸Peter began to say to him, “Look, we have left everything and followed you.” ²⁹Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields, for my sake and for the sake of the good news, ³⁰who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age—houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields, with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life. ³¹But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first.”

Text Questions

What do we know about the man who came to Jesus in this text? (verse 17) What is his question? How does Jesus answer it? (verses 18-19) Is this what the man was looking for? (verse 20) What do you think he was looking for? —I think he was looking for Jesus to say, “well done, you’re in!” What did Jesus think about him? What was Jesus’ heartfelt response to him? (verse 21) What was Jesus’ answer to his question? What was the man’s response? (verse 22) This leads Jesus to reflect on the problem of wealth. What is it? How could wealth keep the man (and us) from the reign of God? (verse 23) Why do you think the disciples were “perplexed” at Jesus’ answer? (verse 24) We tend to assume, like people of Jesus’ time, that wealth is a sign of God’s favor. Does Jesus share that assumption? I don’t know what a camel going through the eye of a needle is like—it seems that it would be impossible. And yet, Jesus says that it’s easier than for someone who is rich to be part of the reign of God. (verse 25) What was the disciples’ question? (verse 26) How is it possible? (verse 27) Do you think it is possible to hold on to your riches (like someone carrying them on their back) and follow Jesus? Peter, who probably was not rich, wants Jesus to remember what he and the other disciples have done to follow Jesus. (verse 28) Does Jesus remember? (verse 29) Jesus reassures Peter that he knows what Peter and the other disciples have done to follow him. What

does he tell them? (verse 30) Is this reassuring, do you think? How is “persecutions” a reward? And for those (perhaps like Peter) who think they will be leading the parade, what does Jesus tell them (and us)? What do you think it means that “the first will be last, and the last will be first”? (You might check on Mark 9:35 and Mark 10:43-44)