

Sermon for Pentecost 15c  
September 18, 2022  
Proper 20c  
The Rev. Canon Raymond Raney  
Trinity on the Hill Episcopal Church  
Los Alamos, New Mexico

Amos 8:4-7  
Psalm 113  
1 Timothy 2:1-7  
Luke 16:1-13

What are we to think of the readings today?

I'd characterize the Amos passage as: "Shame on you! God will get you."

And Timothy, why is that phrase in there: "(I am telling the truth, I am not lying)"

And Luke, here's a guy who's stealing from his boss and his boss commends him for being clever.

All I can say, thank God for the Psalm: "Let the Name of the Lord be blessed, from this time forth for evermore."

I've spent a lot of time this week pondering and researching the readings, and I think the Collect gives us a key to unlock the Scriptures. As it says:

*"Grant us, Lord, not to be anxious about earthly things, but to love things heavenly; and even now, while we are placed among things that are passing away, to hold fast to those that shall endure..."*

The Collect tells us to love heavenly things and hold on to those things that endure. So what does endure?

The northern Kingdom of Israel did not.

Amos, who was from the south of the promised land, was sent to the north to prophesy against the people of Israel. This was around 750 B.C. Israel, which was made up of the ten tribes was in a bull time, as they say in the stock market.

The rich were getting richer than they could have imagined.

And the poor were being left behind.

The gap between rich and poor was growing.

And Amos warns them:

"Hear this, you that trample on the needy, and bring ruin to the poor of the land ... buying the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals."

Your time is coming when the bottom will fall out and you will not have the Lord to call upon.

Amos' prophesy sounds common because he is.

As he tells the king's prophet in the previous chapter: "I am not a prophet or a prophet's son, but a herdsman and a dresser of sycamore trees."

Amos puts things in common, easy to understand terms.

Things are going to get bad because you have forgotten what the Lord has demanded of you:  
that you take care of one another.

What happens is that in 722, the Assyrian army sweeps down from the north and scatters the ten tribes of Israel to the four winds, and the northern kingdom is no more.

As for Timothy, it is one of the disputed letters that scholars debate its authorship.

Most do not believe Paul wrote it for various reasons.

Personally, I see a conflict in Timothy between the way Paul writes about women in his other letters as leaders of the church.

In the letters to Timothy and Titus, the author exercises authority to silence women.

The other issue is that Paul was a rebel, and I can't imagine him advising to get along and not make trouble.

That's all he ever did was stand up for the Good News -  
no matter the pain and suffering he had to endure to do it.

So I think Timothy is problematic.

What I do hold to is the statement:

"For there is one God; there is also one mediator between God and humankind, Christ Jesus,  
himself human, who gave himself a ransom for all."

As for the Gospel today:

Well, it's a tough one. The story is very dense, and the meaning is very complex  
because it is not apparent what Jesus wants us to learn from the story.

Here we have a manager who apparently has not been doing a good job for his boss,  
and who has been called to account.

He ponders what he can do, so he cuts the bills of those who owe his boss  
in hopes that they will be kind to him when he's fired.

There are those who have argued that the manager didn't steal from his boss, but I think the  
arguments that he was cutting away illegal interest or cutting his own percentage are fairly lame.

I think he's stealing from his boss.

Would a boss commend someone for stealing from him?

I think his boss, being a shrewd businessman himself,  
recognizes a wheeler-dealer when he sees one, and commends him for his cleverness.

Remember *The Apprentice*.

All those hungry young business types trying to appear to work together while working even  
harder to make sure they shine, and, if they get a chance, to cut the throats of the others.

All for fear of hearing, "you're fired."

And hoping to hear him say: “you’re hired!”

In the world of *The Apprentice*,  
Luke’s unscrupulous manager would not only be commended, but probably promoted.  
However, I don’t think that’s the outcome Jesus had in mind.

Right after this reading in Luke, it says:

*“The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all this, and they ridiculed him. So he said to them, ‘You are those who justify yourselves in the sight of others; but God knows your hearts; for what is prized by human beings is an abomination in the sight of God. ‘The law and the prophets were in effect until John came; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is proclaimed, and everyone tries to enter it by force. But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away, than for one stroke of a letter in the law to be dropped.’”*

Jesus is calling his people, us, to do what the people of Israel in the time of Amos forgot:  
to take care of one another, to be faithful to God. Jesus is calling the people into relationship.

I think the key is the nature of wealth.

The Pharisees were lovers of money instead of lovers of people.

The people of Israel loved the economic boom but did not use the beneficence of God to care for God’s people.

Paul continually writes of being in community with each other,  
which is why I find it difficult to see him putting some in authority over others.

We are gifts one to another, and there has been no better example of the human gift from God than that of Mother Teresa.

The book by her spiritual director provides her letters,  
which reveal the doubts and pain she suffered for so many years.

Apparently she didn’t want the letters published,  
but I don’t know if keeping them secret would serve the faith.

She is a witness to what faith means.

Faith cannot exist without doubt,  
and I don’t think people outside the faith understand that.

When word of the letters got out,  
Mother Teresa was criticized as a hypocrite.

“The children of this age”  
see preaching love and God’s service in public  
while feeling the absence of God in her heart as hypocrisy.

Other critics suggest that the money donated to the Sisters of Charity would have been better spent on hospitals and eliminating the causes of poverty.

“The children of this age”  
see no value in caring for the dying and the lost.

In her book *Loving Jesus*, Mother Teresa wrote:

*"If we nourish our lives with the Eucharist,  
it will be easy for us to see Christ in that hungry one next door,  
the one lying in the gutter,  
that alcoholic man we shun,  
our husband or our wife, or our restless child.  
For in them, we will recognize  
the distressing disguises of the poor: Jesus in our midst."*

Amidst her doubts and the darkness she felt,  
Mother Teresa's kept faith and worked with the poor and downtrodden  
to do God's work without hope of personal reward.

She treated each person she met as a reflection of Jesus himself.  
In turn, she and her sisters became the image of Christ to those whom they served.

We are called in our varied paths to be less anxious about earthly things,  
and to hold on to what will endure.

So what endures?

What we do for each other.

“As you have done for the least of these, so you have done for me.”

Amen.