

July 17, 2022

“Uncomfortable Good News”

How many of you found yourself thinking, “*I am so glad I came to worship today!*” during the reading of the scripture this morning? Not really the most happy and endearing passage we have ever heard, is it?

And perhaps that isn’t all bad. Because the people of Israel – in the Eighth century B.C. were having a bit of a perception problem. They were, it seems, *totally comfortable* in their belief that God would *take care of and protect them*. And to be fair – *we would like to have that sort of confidence as well*. But what happens when confidence moves from giving us the courage to live as God’s people to **thinking that whatever we choose to do is in line with God’s desire?**

The people have come full circle from being those who were enslaved by others to those liberated by God – to being those who now were happy to manipulate the situation for their own benefit – *even if it meant others were enslaved*. And this is a bridge too far for God – God who time and again said to the children of Israel when giving them an ethical imperative – “You were slaves in the land of Egypt.” You know what it is like to suffer at the hand of another – don’t do it.

What a sad observation of human behavior – that *we too easily become like those who have harmed us*. It is true in contemporary life – and was true so long ago. Along with being *shaped by negative behavior* from others there is also the inclination to believe that *as God’s creatures we are God’s favorites*...you know – like siblings in a family. No offense but you know Mom likes me best!

This is exactly where the Israelites found themselves – **convinced** they were God’s favorites – but not remembering that being a beloved child rightly issues forth in the end to **wanting to be like the one who loves you**. They were happy to accept privilege but forgot it always comes with responsibility.

Presbyterians should really like passages like these – not because they forecast bad things – but *because they declare the God is sovereign*. The tail does not wag the dog. We don’t manipulate God to do our bidding because we are loved – **we try to please God who loves us**. God is not our servant – we serve God. This is the underlying truth which is a helpful corrective when we have begun to believe that *God is there to justify what we already want or believe*.

The text we read this morning is near the end of the book of Amos. There have been *many* attempts by God through the prophet to call the people back – and the people simply won't listen. But *God has no joy* in the judgement which has come upon the people who are loved and won't listen. The key here is God always tells the truth. And though we humans are easily misled by what we wish were so – God tells the truth.

This is at the heart of judgement. *What is right and true and in line with God's life.* Judgement isn't telling the cheating merchants they are bad – it is telling the crooked merchants they are cheaters - and that it is unacceptable to God. It is the truth. *The cheating was rooted in loving money more than God* – and they were sure God was OK with that because God was watching out for them and having more money was better for them. *If ever there is a place in scripture where we are called to wake up in the face of a materialistic culture – this is it.*

Our eyes get wide, and we feel a sense of hopelessness when we hear the things which will come upon God's people in this passage. Yet, the underlying reality here is the call to *live one's faith*. Yes, the world can be a hard knock place. But it is no good saying – *my faith is over there and my choices for living are over here.* If God is over there, my concern for daily needs is over there as well. We all live as people of faith whose allegiance is to God. There is a reason Jesus taught us to ask God to meet our daily needs – to look to God for life.

Our broken world can be a cruel place – and we *dare not allow it to mold us* into its shape for the sake of imagined necessity. There is only one way to life which lasts. The way of God who hears the cries of the poor and those crushed by injustice and greed. God is the one who sees and hears and tells the truth – and as we seek to love God back – we want to do all those things as well.

Faith and life are inextricably intertwined. It is uncomfortable but important good news. The Rabbi's credit Amos with giving us a singular focus for living – “Seek God and live.” Helpful words to live by indeed. Such seeking of God's life and ways isn't always comfortable – but it is always good. God help us to desire such uncomfortable good news.