

Amos 7:7-15

“Competing Voices”

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 10B)

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Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, West Salem, Wisc.

Pastor Peter Adelsen

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen! Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

“This is what [the Lord God] showed me: behold, the Lord was standing beside a wall 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’” (Amos 7:7-8).

The meaning of this vision is clear. The Lord is picturing Himself as a mason laying brick or stone. The wall represents Israel, the people He created to receive His covenant. The plumb line is His Law, the standard laid down at Mount Sinai for Israel’s life as His covenant people. But this Law, this plumb line, also reveals Israel’s sin. For the people are like a sagging, crooked wall, that is in need of being torn down.

God’s people were crooked as they flaunted their unfaithfulness to the Lord. They were crooked as they abandoned the plumb line of God’s Law. You see, it is only through the Law that we become conscious of sin (Romans 3:20). So, without the Ten Commandments before them, to measure what they thought, said, and did, their lives were “out of line,” like a crooked wall ready to be torn down. So, the prophet Amos pronounces judgment against the perverse worship of the Kingdom of Israel and divine judgment against the house of King Jeroboam. But God’s Word is not heeded but hated. Amos is told to pack his bags and go back to where he came from: Judah.

In our Gospel reading (Mark 6:14-29), John the Baptist has been preaching repentance. He has been calling all people to repent of their sins for the Messiah has come and the reign of God is at hand. Like Amos, John is calling God’s people to repentance. And like Amos, he has called upon a specific person as well, King Herod – to specifically repent of his sin of marrying his brother’s wife, Herodias. But like Amos before him, God’s Word is not heeded, but hated. For his call to repentance, John’s head is cut off and paraded at a party on a platter.

Throughout the Scriptures, the triune God reveals an intense concern that His voice, His true and life-giving voice, be heard and heeded. And throughout history, God’s voice has more often not been heeded, but rather hated. Generation after generation, twisted heart after twisted heart, fallen man prefers to listen to any other voice but God’s voice.

Our fallen nature demands that God's voice be silenced, be set aside, and moved far off. Our fallen nature would rather see God's messengers sent back home, cast in a pit, sawn in two, beheaded, and crucified.

Throughout Bible history, God would have His Word be primary and uncontested. In the Garden of Eden, God rebukes Adam, saying, ***“Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree, of which I commanded you, ‘You shall not eat of it,’ cursed is the ground because of you”*** (Genesis 3:17).

Later on, God covenanted with Israel at Mount Sinai saying, ***“If you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, you shall be My treasured possession among all peoples”*** (Exodus 19:5). Then what happened? The next thing you know, Aaron is no longer listening to God's voice, but to the voice of the people, and before you know it, the people are worshipping a golden calf.

Eventually, God's people desired to be like their pagan neighbors with a king. They demanded God give them a king. They thought a king would surely fight for them and give them desired unity. But by swearing loyalty to an earthly king would only be breaking covenant with their Lord, who was already fighting on their behalf as their King. God warned them that an earthly king would only be for earthly gain, but He grants them an earthly king.

From the start, King Saul feared the people more than he feared God. Saul ignored God's voice and listened to the voice of the people.

Prophet after prophet warned God's people as they proclaimed God's Word: ***“Turn from your evil ways and keep My commandments and My statutes, in accordance with all the Law that I commanded your fathers, and that I sent to you by My servants the prophets.’ But they would not listen, but were stubborn, as their fathers had been, who did not believe in the LORD their God”*** (1 Kings 17:13-14).

This theme continues into the New Testament times. When Jesus' teachings became too difficult, many of his followers turned back and no longer walked with Him. Jesus then asked the Twelve: ***“Do you want to go away as well?”*** (John 6:67). Then Peter replied, ***“Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life”*** (John 6:68).

So, why is it so difficult to heed God's Word? Why is it that we would rather hate God's voice?

Well, that answer has to do with our evil foes: our sinful nature, the fallen world, and Satan himself. You see, Satan uses our sinful nature and this fallen world to lead us sinners away from hearing the Word of God. He wants to keep you from hearing and taking seriously what God has to say. Satan's agenda is to prevent you and others from hearing the life-giving voice of your Maker and Redeemer.

So, how does Satan do this? Well, just look at today's reading from Amos. One of Satan's approaches is to fill the arena with an umpteen number of false voices to drown out or marginalize the true voice of God. Throughout the Bible, we read of false prophets, counterfeit voices. In fact, these false voices outnumbered the true prophets. These false prophets would tell sinners what they wanted to hear, and as a result, they were popular. That way sinners would basically only listen to themselves. The true Word of God is never the only voice in the arena. It was – *and still is* – a competitive environment.

Besides drowning out God's voice, another approach by Satan is to silence God's life-giving and life-saving Word. That is what Satan led Herod to do with John the Baptist. Satan, the ruler of this fallen world, strives to prevent sinners from hearing the true Word of God. He leads people to discount it, to trivialize it, to ignore it, to dismiss it as only human speech and human opinion.

In fact, in Amos' time, the northern kingdom of Israel was more political than religious. The Israelites were only loyal to King Jeroboam. They listened to the voice of their earthly king, rather than to God's voice. And like that golden calf in Exodus, Jeroboam erected a golden calf at Bethel where he told the Israelites to come and pay their homage. Israelites pilgrimed there to show their loyalty to King Jeroboam.

To this false worship, Amos prophesied God's judgment upon Israel and its king. Would God's Word be heard and heeded? No, it would be hated, because to proclaim judgment against Bethel was to oppose the king. You see, the king of Israel and the temple at Bethel were united. So, to proclaim against one was to proclaim against the other. The Kingdom of Israel supported and promoted this perverse religion as the false priest Amaziah of Bethel said to Amos: ***“O seer, go, flee away to the land of Judah, and eat 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”*** (Amos 7:12-13).

In other words, *“Get out of here Amos! You don't belong here! You are disrupting the peace! Let us do what we want! Go back where you came from!”* Does this sound familiar?

More and more today, Christians are demanded to keep quiet. To keep our faith secluded from public life. Those who preach and confess God's Word often face opposition. Christians are opposed by political means and by public opinion. Jesus too, warned us, saying: ***"A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you"*** (John 15:20).

So, as Christians, we must always be prepared to face opposition in heeding God's voice. We must always heed the Lord's voice in studying, hearing, and applying His Word in the Bible. Faithfulness to God's Word should be every Christian's concern as we train the next generation of Christians. And we must be ready to heed God's Word against earthly authorities and popular opinion. But all too often, we'd rather listen to competing voices, including your own voice, and refuse to hear God's voice. We may find God's voice of Law and Gospel to be irrelevant and boring.

So, why does God say that His voice must be heard? Because through His voice, we hear His promises. And His promises are trustworthy and true. The promises of false voices, the promises of this fallen world, only mislead. They direct us to believe in illusions. But only the one true God – *the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit* – fulfills promises. Those are the promises to actually listen to, take to heart, inwardly digest, believe, and trust in. They are true promises given by the Lord God Almighty Himself.

In the fullness of time, every promise that God's prophets foretold was fulfilled when ***"God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under the Law, to redeem those who were under the Law, so that we might receive adoption as sons"*** (Galatians 4:4-5). Jesus embodied Israel and went through death just like the Kingdom of Israel. But Christ's death was more severe as He suffered the just punishment of God against all sinners. God the Father laid upon His Son the iniquity of us all. Jesus suffered in place of sinners and for sinners. He suffered and died in your place. But He conquered the grave three days later!

Where we have failed, Jesus has prevailed! Where we have been foolish and slow of heart to believe all that God has spoken, Jesus prevails. So, let us heed God's voice, not hate God's voice. Let us not be proud and foolish, but humble and wise. That chastening rebuke of the Law along with His resurrecting Gospel is what this fallen world hates. But let us heed by God's grace with repentance, faith, and joy. Let us heed His Word and feast on His promises of forgiveness, life, and salvation! Amen.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen. **+ SOLI DEO GLORIA +**