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St. John's Lutheran Church of Burlington  
21 July 2024

Sermon on Amos 7:10-15

Worship Theme:

**MEANINGFUL MINISTRY: SENT WITH GOD'S OWN AUTHORITY**

As believers carry out gospel ministry, encouraging others to turn to Christ in repentance, people might push back. "What gives you the right?" When our God calls us to do ministry, he also gives us authority. We are sharing God's own authoritative Word. Gospel ministry is conducted by believers but with God's own authority behind the effort.

Sermon Theme: "Sent with Authority"

Grace, and mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen!

Do you like being corrected? I think most of us would probably say, no, we don't particularly enjoy it when other people correct us. We like being correct! But we don't enjoy the process of correction, because our sinful nature and our pride bristle (at least inwardly!) at the thought that we could be wrong. It makes us feel as if the other person is better than we are simply because they were right and we were wrong. We don't mind in the slightest when we're the ones going around correcting the thoughts and behavior of others! But if they correct us, well...

That was the job of the Old Testament prophet Amos. It seems we don't talk about Amos all that often, so it's possible we can't immediately recall too many details about him. Amos lived in the 700s B.C., during the time of the divided kingdoms of God's people. He came from the Southern Kingdom of Judah and was a man of relatively humble background, as we learn in our verses today: a shepherd who also had a fig tree farm. But he was given an incredibly important task to do.

The ten tribes of the Northern Kingdom of Israel were in serious trouble. They were prospering in ways rarely seen before, rivaled only by the days of David and Solomon. They were wealthy, no foreign powers were threatening them, and they had even expanded their borders by successfully taking back territories lost long ago. Israel was prospering and her people felt unstoppable.

They had one major problem though – they had once again abandoned the LORD. They were so filled with national pride, adoration for their king, and excitement at their riches that idol worship was raging throughout the kingdom and worship of the true God was all but forgotten. Something needed to change or the majority of the people through whom God would send his Messiah Savior could be lost from faith forever. And God chose Amos to warn them.

What would you do? If you were in Amos' position, how would you handle that? A call from the LORD to proclaim his message to people is not to be taken lightly – this is serious stuff! Our congregation is blessed with a handful of pastors

and teachers, but the vast majority of us here at St. John's are neither. So we may not naturally think about things like "calls from the LORD" and "the necessity of sharing God's message with other people." But whether you are a called worker in the Church or not, we all have a call to proclaim God's truth. So what do you do?

Anytime we read through Scripture, it doesn't take long to find God calling someone to this work. Sadly, it also doesn't take long to find a human being struggling with this call. We make all kinds of excuses – "I don't know what to say! I didn't go to school for that! I'm still learning these things myself. I've never had to do this before. What if the person doesn't want to hear it? What if they don't like me anymore? What if I get something wrong? It's too scary!" We could go on and on, and we often do, don't we. Anyone who reads God's Word with any regularity knows there are countless things in it that all people need to hear, both us and others! And yes, it may not always be easy; but it is eternally important.

Amos was called to go to a nation technically different from his own with a message of judgment, judgment, and more judgment. It was going to be hard work and they were almost guaranteed to not want to hear what he had to say. If Amos was worried about rejection, our verses from chapter 7 today show that he was correct in expecting that they did not want to be corrected. Amaziah the priest of Bethel, *said to Amos, "Get out, you seer! Go back to the land of Judah. Earn your bread there and do your prophesy-ing there. Don't prophesy anymore at Bethel, because this is the king's sanctuary and the temple of the kingdom."*

I wonder how tempting it must have been for Amos to give in to those words and to turn around and go back to the simple life he came from. He came to Israel with a message of correction, a message calling the people out for their sin against the LORD and begging them to repent or face the judgment of God. Obviously that was going to be difficult to say and obviously many people weren't going to want to hear it. So why not just go back to the sheep and the fig trees. If they don't want to listen, fine! Let them suffer the consequences and be lost!

Of course Amos couldn't do that though, because that's not how the LORD saw the situation at all. The LORD does not abandon his people. People have been straying away from God for as long as there have been people. Yet God continues to come after us, determined that his message will be **Sent with Authority** again. In fact, that was God's command to Amos: "*Go, prophesy to my people!*" Along with Amos, we get to briefly explore God's "who", "what", and "why."

First the "who." God's message comes both to us and through us. When we look at these 6 verses from Amos ch. 7, we see a lot of names. God is not reaching out to random unknown living creatures – he sends his message to people who are known to him. Of course, because God knows absolutely everything, absolutely everyone is known to him. And he cares enough about the people to whom he comes to call us by our names. Here we see Amaziah the priest, Jeroboam the king, Israel the nation, Amos the prophet, Judah the nation. None of these are unknown people to God! They are people whom God cares about tremendously and therefore God cannot sit idly by while they self-destruct on a path which can only lead to eternal separation from him in hell.

Think about that! I don't have to explain how people react when receiving correction from God, because we experience it all the time. We hate it! We don't want to be told we're wrong, we don't want to be told we're sinning, and we don't want to be told we need to change. But do we realize what the alternative is? The alternative is a God who doesn't care in the slightest if we condemn ourselves to hell by the things we choose to think, say, and do; a God who could not care less if we're with him forever or not; a God who makes commands but doesn't back them with any authority at all. The alternative is a God who will not save. Israel was on the fast-track to life apart from God forever. Can you imagine what kind of God he would be if he didn't care about that at all?

But God did care and he does care. So God took a man named Amos and **sent him with authority** to call out to the people of Israel, rebuking them for their impenitence and unbelief. All throughout the Bible we find God doing this over and over again and he even tells us why! In 2 Corinthians 7, Paul says: *I am happy, not because you were made sorry, but because your sorrow led you to repentance. For you became sorrowful as God intended and so were not harmed in any way by us.* <sup>10</sup> *Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret.* Psalm 119:71, *It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees.* Hebrews 12 (quoting Prov. 3), *Do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines the one he loves.*

God corrects people because he loves people. God calls to repentance because he wants people to live with HIM forever, not with Satan forever. So God takes human messengers and **sends them with authority** – they go because he commands them to! And they do not go empty handed. Amos was not sent to Israel wondering what he would say when he got there. He went with the message God had prepared for him. It was a tough message of judgment and condemnation if the people did not repent, but it was a message of truth, a message of power, a message of authority, and it needed to be said. The people NEEDED to hear it!

This summer I've taken on a bit of a larger reading project. I'm reading through a collection of writings by some of our WELS theologians and seminary professors from 100 years ago or so. In those writings, they were already lamenting how infrequently people read their Bibles and how easily people went about their day without having gotten into the Word of God first. I couldn't help but feel convicted in my own life and perhaps those words convict you too. We so easily put Bible reading off until later and, next thing we know, our heads are hitting the pillow at night and "later" never came. It's the same reason we find it so easy to miss church or Bible class on a weekend. We have "more important" things to do and we'll get to it when we have time, because we always assume there's more time to be had. God's Word will be there when I'm ready for it.

Maybe, like me, you can't help but notice a connection between us and an small ancient nation called Israel. "I can't focus on God right now, I'm having too much fun/I'm too busy/I don't have the time." Perhaps we need to remember that the words we read in the book we call the Bible are not just random words written by any random person. Every time we gather for worship in this sanctuary at St.

John's, one of our pastors stands in front of the room, reads a portion of the Bible, and then says "The Word of the Lord", after which we half-heartedly mumble a "thanks be to God" and immediately move on to the next thing in the bulletin. So let's slow down for a moment and think about what we just experienced, what the phrase "the Word of the Lord" actually means. We just heard words **sent with authority** directly from the mouth of our Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier. The God who MADE us, the God who SAVED us, and the God who declares us holy by grace through faith – THAT GOD just spoke to us!!

It blows our minds, doesn't it. It's incredibly humbling. Whatever the words were, God knew we needed to hear them. Likely there were some words in there that condemned us for our sin, which is absolutely appropriate. In the past week, day, even hour, I sinned, you sinned, we all sinned. We need to be corrected by God and his Word. And because he knows us and loves us so deeply, God **sends his Word with authority** and brings it right to us, the people who need it. There we find not just a message of correction, but also a message of forgiveness, for that is why God corrects us – not because he longs for us to be wrong and for him to be right, but rather because he longs to tell us for the billionth time, "I forgive you. I love you. Take heart, child; we're at peace."

That's why God **sent Amos with authority** – because God longed to hold his people in his arms again, reassuring them that their *guilt was taken away and their sin atoned for*. (Is. 6:7) The Law must come first, showing us how we have strayed from God. Then we are perfectly prepared for the Gospel God gives us even though we don't deserve it: the good news that our sins are forgiven in Jesus. That entire message comes with the authority of the LORD! We need to hear it, and by God's grace we get to!

Then we also get to share it. God **sent his Word with authority**. Now he **sends us with authority too** – regardless of our background or training. Amos didn't carry around in his satchel a fancy degree from the Theological Seminary of Jerusalem! He was a regular guy from a normal place with a common career – a person just like each and every one of us. Which means just like Amos, we also get to rejoice that we are people to whom God **sent his message with authority** and through whom God still **sends his message with authority**. It's a message every single person needs – what a priceless eternal blessing that God gives it to us!

Let's pray:

O Lord, your Word is absolute truth. Correct us whenever we think we know better than you how our lives should go, and call us to repentance when we stray from your commands. We praise you for the good news that you freely forgive our sins in Christ and you have prepared for us a home in eternal glory with you. Now **send us with authority** to proclaim your holy Word to as many other people as we can, and bless our efforts for Jesus' sake. In his holy name we boldly ask it, AMEN.

And the peace of God which goes beyond all understanding will guard and keep our hearts and our minds through faith in Christ Jesus. Amen.