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Grace Lutheran Church, Wichita, KS
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In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit

For the Christian there are always two options in life.
You can either run with the Lord or against Him.
You can obey or rebel,
follow or stray,
repent or make excuses.

And I can tell you right now, we all like to do a little of both.

Even we, who are baptized, who desire the things of the Lord,
we nevertheless choose the things of the world.

That's just how we work:

We take the easy way.
We *lie*, even to friends;
we *gossip*, and don't think twice about it;
and we all have our secret *lusts*, whether for women, wine, or wealth,
and since no one else knows or sees, we're alright.

Our sin is easy to hide.

It's easy to cover up and forget about.

Excuses come without hesitation.

But when we're honest with ourselves, it's difficult remaining faithful.

For the Christian there are always two options in life,
we can either run with or against the Lord.

And to get our feet running in the right direction, the Lord sends His prophets.

Today we meet the prophet Amos.

Like Ezekiel last week, Amos's call is to:

“a nation who rebels against Yahweh, whose descendants also are impudent and stubborn” (Ezek 2:3).

But unlike Ezekiel, Amos is **“a herdsman and dresser of sycamore figs”** (Amos 7:14) –
nothing more than a simple farmer.

But this simple farmer, like Ezekiel and all the prophets, is called to stand before Yahweh and *see*
what the Lord will show him.

He's to *look* and *listen* and *chat* with Yahweh about the secret things of Yahweh.

And on this particular day Yahweh calls him up and shows him a vision of a plumb line.

(Now a plumb line is simply a tool to make sure a wall is straight. It's a long string with a heavy weight hanging at the bottom. Anything crooked or out of place is quickly seen and made straight with the plumb line.)

Now after showing him the vision, Yahweh says,

“Amos, what do you see?”

And Amos, replies:

“A plumb line.”

Yahweh says, “Yes!”

“And behold, I am setting a plumb line in the midst of my people Israel; I will never again pass by them; the high places of Isaac shall be made desolate, and the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid waste, and I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword.” (7:8-9)

That’s quite a vision!

Bad news if you’re Israel!

Now, before we go on we should know a little more about Amos.

You see, this chapter opened with two other visions:

the first was a giant swarm of locusts,

the second a blazing fire.

Both were visions of judgment against Israel for *their* false worship.

But part of the call of the prophet is his compassion for his people.

Amos loves Israel.

So when Yahweh calls Amos into His heavenly council to show him a vision of destruction –

Amos’s instinct is to plead, **“O Lord Yahweh, Forgive!” (7:2,5)**

That is, “Stop! Don’t do it!”

And because Amos is His prophet, and speaks the words that Yahweh gives,

Yahweh too has compassion:

“Yahweh repents. ‘It shall not be.’” (7:3,6)

Now the plumb line makes a little more sense.

Again, Yahweh shows Amos a vision of judgment.

But this time Amos *doesn’t* intercede –

He doesn’t pray for Israel.

Why?

Amos doesn’t pray because he doesn’t get the chance!

“Amaziah, the priest of Beth-el” (7:10) breaks onto the scene.

He already sent word to the King, telling him how Amos has caused a raucous, saying:

“Amos has conspired against you in your own home.

The land isn’t able to bear all his words.”

Now it’s no wonder Amaziah’s a little ticked off.

Think about it: He's running a successful congregation and then here comes some no-name-prophet who actually thinks Yahweh speaks to him.

He's not only preaching that the people avoid his thriving services,
but that the services are sinful and that temple will be destroyed.

Amos calls *you* out as being unfaithful –

He says *your* worship's a wash –

And all of this he claims is the word of Yahweh.

“Who does he think he is?”

Amos doesn't get to pray for Israel because Amaziah, one of Israel's wealthy priests, grabs a hold of him and cries:

“O seer, go! Take yourself away! Flee away to the land of Judah. Eat your bread there and prophecy there! But never again prophecy against Beth-el, for it is the King's sanctuary, and the Kingdom's temple.”

If only Amaziah knew that Amos prayed for Israel.

But Amaziah doesn't know what a prophet is.

As far as he's concerned, the prophets are there just to make the king look good.

They're to speak of success and power, fame and glory.

They're *not* supposed to speak of judgment:

that the King will die or that the people “**must go into exile!**” (7:11)

That's why, when Amaziah bullies Amos to leave the Northern Kingdom and eat his bread down south, in Judah, Amos replies:

“I am *not* a prophet, nor the son of a prophet.” (7:14)

The last thing Amos wants to do is be counted among the false prophets—

those sooth-sayers, who speak what itching ears want to hear.

No, Amos is a true prophet –

even if he is just a simple farmer and keeper of the sycamore fig trees.

He preaches whatever he sees and hears Yahweh revealing in the heavenly council.

The Lord's word is his word,

no matter what the king, or this false priest, or anyone else has to say.

Amos is Israel's pastor.

And Yahweh has shown him a vision of a plumb line –

And it doesn't look good for Israel.

So what does Israel do?

Well, she rejects her pastor.

There are always two options for Israel, for the Christian:
 either to hear our Lord's word with humility and repentance,
 or to go our own way, hear our own words, and close our ears to the Lord.

Israel, with Amaziah as her priest, wants to worship God on her own terms, in her own way.
 She doesn't want to hear His word, His will, or His way.
 And so there's no room in her land for Amos or his plumb line.

And so the plumb line must come forth.
 It must reveal what is crooked in Israel.

And this time Amos doesn't intercede.
 The judgment must come.

When Yahweh sends His prophets with a Word—
 even a word of judgment—
 the prophet must speak the word—even if it ends up costing him his head.

And just as Amos ran to Israel with a plumb line from Yahweh,
 so do I run to you today –
 plumb line in hand,
repent.

Repent of choosing your ways over His.
 Repent of your false worship, thinking it's about you and what you do for Him.
 Repent of your lies, your gossip, your lust, and your anger.

Run with Christ and not Amaziah.

No more excuses.
 Confess your sin, your secret sin, and let the Lord do the justifying.
 That's what the plumb line's for.

You see: the plumb line is the means by which all things are measured.
 It's the stone that hangs straight.
 And the stone that the builders rejected has become the capstone—
 Christ Jesus, the rock, our Lord.

He's the one that hangs and justifies the world.
 Jesus is the vision that Amos saw,
 and the message of all *true* prophets.

And today the vision becomes clear: CHRIST IS THE PLUMB LINE.

But do not fear, you will not be crushed by this plumb line—
 for He has made you right with God by hanging as the plumb line on the cross.

And even though Amaziah, gossip, lust, anger, and false worship all fall before this plumb line—
it's by this plumb line that you live.

Jesus Christ, who shed His blood on the cross for you,
now gives His word of forgiveness to you.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit