

SERMON – The Seventh Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 10)

Amos 7:7-17

Psalm 82

Colossians 1:1-14

Luke 10:25-37

Throughout scripture we hear many stories of how God uses the least likely of people to do great things. The stories of Amos and the Good Samaritan are two such stories.

Amos was a shepherd and he tended to sycamore-fig trees in the Judean countryside. Amos was not a prophet nor was he the son of a prophet, but he loved God and devoted his life to serving God and he was an honest man. God came to Amos one day in a vision and Amos saw God holding a plumb line. We know that a plumb line is a very simple yet necessary tool which is used to ensure the straightness of a wall which will be strong and long lasting. God wants us to have a good and right relationship with him, one that is free from sin and using a plumb line as a measure will be our guide as to how to be right with God.

The people in the northern kingdom of Israel were becoming too complacent, they were worshipping idols and were oppressing the poor and so God was not pleased with them. God asked Amos to tell the people that if they did not change their ways he would pass judgment on them. Of course when Amos delivers God's message to the Chief Priest Amaziah, who then tells Jeroboam the King of Israel, they were not at all concerned about God's message, they seemed to only want to maintain their own positions so they would not listen to anything God had to say.

This always seems to present a problem when leadership takes on their own ideals instead of following the path of God. Amos was the least likely messenger in the eyes of the Chief Priest and the King of Israel, and they were quite happy to keep things the way they were. Since they did not heed God's message to change their ways, very soon trouble befell their country.

But Amos was a faithful servant of God and he obeyed God's command to prophesy to God's people of Israel. Are we willing to obey God's call when it comes to us? Are we willing to speak the truth in love to our leaders, or anyone else for that matter, when we see something being done that is not right and we have prayed about it and we feel that the Spirit is telling us to say something? This is not an easy thing to do, but oftentimes God calls the least of us to deliver such a message, and it is up to us to obey that call.

Paul is another faithful servant of God who traveled far and wide to tell the story of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles and the Jews. Paul is writing to the people of Colossae telling them that he has been continually praying that they may be filled with the knowledge of God's will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. There was a connectedness between Paul and the people of Colossae which comes through prayer, and it is said that Paul never did visit Colossae, but he prayed for the people and encouraged them to live in the ways of God. When we pray with our heart it becomes the active presence of God's Spirit at work in our life. So when we do our intercessory prayers, we do not really have to know the people we are praying for, but to hold them up in prayer brings them into the presence of God.

In the gospel story about the Good Samaritan, again we see how God uses the least likely person to do a great deed. The Jews hated the Samaritans, they thought of them as the scum of the earth because they were a mixed race and the Jews thought of themselves as pure descendants of Abraham, but in God's eyes we are all the same because we are all made in the image of God.

We all know the story of the Good Samaritan, it was probably one of the first Bible stories we heard as a child.

Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem, he is on his way to face a trial by people who did not like him because he threatened their authority and they are planning to get rid of him. This of course is very heavy on Jesus' heart, and then he meets a young lawyer who wants to know what he has to do to inherit eternal life. Jesus and the lawyer had quite a dialogue and then to save face the lawyer asks Jesus, "Who is my neighbor?" How often have we disconnected ourselves with this same question?

Jesus then tells the lawyer the story of the Good Samaritan.

Let us take a look at this story again and I invite you to put yourselves into each of the characters in the story.

You are the person who was beaten up by robbers and left as dead. You have been stripped of all your money and most of your clothes, and you have been beaten up, blood is everywhere and you are hurting very badly. You hear people passing by but no one is stopping to help you; and you are **so** weak that you are unable to cry out for help.

How often have you felt like this in your life? When you have experienced some hard times whether it is an illness, the loss of a job, the loss of a loved one, or you are feeling depressed and you desperately want someone to take the time to talk and listen to you, but no one seems to be coming to offer a helping hand or ear; so you just sit there and hurt.

Now you are the Priest or Levite who is on their way to the Temple; and out of the corner of your eyes you see that someone is laying by the side of the road and is bloody and dirty. If you should stop to help you will become unclean and you would have to go through the ritual of cleansing before you could go into the Temple. You are in a hurry so it is better for you to pass on the other side of the road so the hurt man does not see you. And you say very convincingly to yourself, that it is better that I follow the law than to stop and show mercy.

How often have you passed someone on the road that seems to need help, but you just speed along, or you saw someone at work, or at church or even in your family, having a hard day, but you did nothing to help because it is easier to leave it for someone else to help them.

And now you are the Samaritan, and you are not liked by the Jews. But as you are riding along the road you happen to notice that there is a man laying there who seems to have been hurt – yes, he is bleeding and he has been stripped of some of his clothes. You stop and pour oil and wine on his wounds and then put on some bandages, and you take the person to get help.

At sometime in your life you have shown love and compassion to the stranger as you go on your journey.

Then there is the Innkeeper, the Caretaker; you keep a nice Inn for travelers who pass your way and want to spend the night. A Samaritan has just come in and has brought in a man who has been very hurt; you are asked to take care of this man until the Samaritan passes by next week, and he has given you some money to take care of him. Your business is hospitality so of course you will take care of the sick man.

Hopefully at some time in your life you have taken in a stranger and shown hospitality to them; and when you did, it gave you great joy.

Then Jesus asks the young lawyer who of the three people did he think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers? The lawyer answered, rather sheepishly I would suspect, “The one who showed Mercy,” and Jesus told him to go and do likewise.

Having placed ourselves as each of the characters in this story, I would suspect that we can identify with each one of them; that at some time in our life we have represented all these people. Jesus wants us to show love and compassion to all God’s people, because **EVERYONE** is our neighbor. How does this make us feel and how do we now answer the question as to who is your neighbor.

But let us not leave out Jesus the storyteller. As I said earlier, Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem to face a hostile crowd and to face his own death.

The story of Jesus is the story of Love and the story of the Good Samaritan is also a story about Love; these two stories are tied and held together with a LOVE that is so strong that Jesus gave himself up for everyone of us so that we might live a life free from the bondage of sin.

Who is going to show Mercy on Jesus in his time of need? We are, because we can do no less than to share this love every single day with our neighbors. Every good deed that we do must be filled with God's love for us; every act that we perform must also be filled with God's love, and if it is not, then we are performing the act for selfish reasons just at the King of Israel did as a leader, and what the apostle Paul warns us not to do.

As we continue to learn from scripture and apply what we learn to our lives, Trinity offers many opportunities to help us along the way. We have **Prayer Ministries** to help to strengthen our prayer life; we have a **Pastoral Care and Stephen Ministry** to show care and concern to those in need. Next week after our Service we are meeting to discuss Pastoral Care in this parish and we invite anyone interested in this ministry to join us. We have a **Stewardship Ministry** to help us be good stewards of all God's gifts especially how to use our time, talent and treasure for the building up of the church. We invite you to join us after this Service as the Stewardship Ministry meets to discuss ways we can use our gifts and to consider building a community garden here at Trinity. We also have **fellowship groups** to help us to get to know each other better, and to have some fun at the same time.

When we gather here each week for Worship, our Service nourishes us so that we can go out into the world to live the life Jesus wants for us. We are inspired to use the plumb line to guide us in building a strong faithful relationship with God. We are encouraged to show compassion, love and mercy to everyone so that we will inherit eternal life. We are fed with the food of forgiveness and love which strengthens us and gives us the courage to face life's challenges. We learn to be open to hearing God's call as we follow what the Spirit is telling us; and then we are sent out filled with God's Love and Peace to sustain us until we gather again.

May the God of Love fill us all with His Grace.

Amen