

The Danger of Too Much

Amos 6:1-14

The book of Amos from which we get our reading from today is actually a collection of oracles. Almost all of the prophecies in the book are from Amos himself, with a few possibly from another prophet. The book was probably compiled after the Babylonian exile in the sixth century, when the people of Judah were taken from their land and forced to live in the land of Babylon for a time period.

We don't know much about Amos himself. It is believed that he was a southerner, coming from the southern kingdom of Judah from the little town of Tekoa. The emphasis in the book of Amos is not on the prophet, but rather on the prophecies. The book is a good example of putting emphasis on the work of the Lord rather than the work of an individual man.

This book is a continuation of the series on the minor prophets, the twelve little books at the end of the Old Testament. Like many of the prophets, the message of Amos is one calling out the people for their sinful ways and tells of how the people will suffer for forgetting the Lord their God. The people are cast to be a people focused on themselves, and not on the work of God that needed to take place.

So because of this scene of sinful nature, we get some less-than-pleasant things discussed by the prophet. The prophet's message was meant to cut at the core of people and if you look at the reading from today you can see that move made by Amos. Hear again the words at the end of the reading. (Read 11-14)

How's that for some pleasant reading? Doesn't that just make you want to run out and give Amos a great big hug for the kind words? Hardly. Yet it is important to understand why the prophet was saying such harsh words to the people.

When Amos was giving oracles, the people of Israel were not upholding the covenant between God and the people. In fact, the people had turned away from justice and again were focusing on themselves. In our reading we have the passage where Amos is calling out against the people for filling themselves up with riches while ignoring the main issues of society. The people had retreated into luxury rather than helping out their fellow neighbor.

I think the message of Amos in our reading is very applicable to us today. As Americans we live far better off than most of the world and we take so much for granted. We often fall prey to consumerism and focus on getting more and more while our less fortunate neighbors struggle to make it by.

When I think of consuming too much, I simply don't have to look far. In fact, I know I fall prey to consumerism. I know that I sometimes feel like I need more to make myself happy. I feel that I need to have the best clothes or the newest gadget to find true happiness. Yet I have to remind myself that this is not the course of happiness.

I think it is easy to fall prey to the evils of consuming too much. We live in a society where it is possible to live extravagantly and it is completely socially acceptable. It is a desire for us in society to strive for things that are beyond what we need, such as a luxury car or the finest designer clothes. We are faced everywhere we go with the idea that we need more to be happy or that by finding more we are doing the right thing.

Amos spoke out against this. Today it is easy to fall into the trap of our ancestors and begin to live in the lifestyle of too much. We begin to lose on what is truly important and that is a right relationship with our God and Creator. We sometimes create idols for ourselves in our things and lose the focus of having a right relationship with God. By focusing on the material

wealth of the world and not on our relationship with our God we are falling into sin and an imbalanced relationship with God.

I remember reading a study once upon a time that compared happiness across cultures and countries. It was an attempt to find out whether being in a good economic situation was better than being extremely poor in a poor country. I remember the study was interesting in that it was focused almost totally on material wealth and not on other factors of happiness.

The study came back showing that material goods did not have the impact on happiness than you would have thought. Having more goods didn't necessarily bring about more happiness. In fact it showed that people in wealthier countries faced more stress and fear of losing things than those in poorer cultures. It showed the fact that the more you had, the more problems you had.

Later on this prompted another study, that tried to find what makes people happy. This study was done so that it would eliminate economic considerations. The results of the study showed that it was in relationships, people found happiness. Even if you were an introvert or an extrovert it seemed that a relationship with someone gave people happiness. It found that people with a profound relationship in their faith often were the happiest. Having a relationship with your neighbor or your God, was what truly brought about good things in people.

I'm sure Amos if he had these studies would have used them in his oracles against the wealth of society. He would have probably told the people that they needed to focus on the relationships in their lives and not focus on getting so much in our lives.

Now if we take the message of Amos and apply it to ourselves, we'll probably come back with a rough image of who we are. For as a broken people we are trapped by sin and will fall into the temptation of finding happiness in material wealth. Let me make it clear though, having

things does not make one a sinner. It's about where your focus is. If your focus is on material wealth, then you've fallen into sin. But if your intentions are on keeping a right relationship with God, then your heart will show that.

Yet there is hope in all of this. At the end of the book of Amos the prophecies shift from the destruction of people focused on wealth to a focus on the restoration of the people. Amos spoke that while times would be rough for those who continued to live life in a worldly fashion, they would indeed suffer. But once the people recognized the evil of their ways they would be restored into a right relationship with God. Here these words from the end of the book (Read 8:11-15)

We don't believe in a God that simply puts out judgments alone. We believe in a God that is about getting in a right relationship. God always offers a way for restoration. God offers a way of walking away from the sin of the world and entering into the relationship that we need to have with God. God can still use broken people to advance the greater good of God's kingdom.

When I think of this restoration that Amos discusses I actually am drawn to the Gospels. I believe that the whole of the Bible is one complete narrative, with the various parts interacting with each other in a greater story about God's love for us. Even as a broken people, we have a place in God's kingdom.

In Jesus's ministry in the gospels, there were many occasions where Christ called forth a people that were broken in order to advance the mission of Christ while he was on earth. In our Gospel reading for the day we come across the story of when Christ called the first disciples. In this story, we see how people can be used for a greater good.

In the calling of the first disciples we find Jesus teaching from a boat, for the crowd had pushed him far back from shore. Now the fisherman whom Jesus borrowed the boat from had

been fishing very hard and had caught nothing. Jesus tells the fisherman to put down their nets and they caught a massive amount of fish.

Peter, the disciple whom Jesus would have the closest relationship with, came down and told Christ to go away from him after they caught all of the fish. For Peter cried out that he was a sinful man and could never do the work that was called for by Christ. Yet this did not faze Christ. For Christ called not only Peter, but other men to be disciples of Christ.

I think it is easy for us that once we realize how broken of a people we are, we begin to question if we can be restored. When we get caught up in the danger of too much we may feel that we are too lost to even be brought back forth to a solid relationship with God. In reality, we don't have to fall prey to such thoughts.

I believe that even when we get caught up in the world and struggle to find that right relationship with God, we have the example of Christ reaching out to us. Even though we may get caught up in getting too much in our lives, Christ calls us to a closer relationship with him and not only calls for the relationship, but also calls for us to have an active part in spreading the good news.

I say these things because I believe that we can be restored. Amos himself believed in restoration. God calls us to a new life in Jesus Christ so that we may be instruments of restored relationships. Even when we have sinned and feel that there is no way that we could ever be an active part of the kingdom, we are called forth to serve.

I believe that in relationship with God and Christ we can be moved by the Holy Spirit to act in a way that transforms not only us, but those we come into contact with. Don't fall into the easy desires of material wealth, but focus on the wealth of a relationship with your God. Christ calls us, are you ready to serve? Amen.