

Sermon for 10 July 2022 @ Bethesda UMC/Baltimore

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

Scriptures: Amos 7:7-17; Psalter (UM804) (*No response*) Psalm 82; Colossians 1:1-14; Luke 10:25-37

***“Imagine the truth.”***

Who was Obama’s pastor? The one that was so outspoken about race relations and politics. Such a powerful preacher. Obama finally separated himself from him during the last days of his campaign. The one who said, “God damn America.”

He was right. That’s exactly the prophet Amos’s point, in today’s first lesson. The only difference between him and us is that the people of Israel believed a prophet could start God’s will to working just by preaching about it

I prefer to wait until the end of the week before I write my sermon. Friday night I turned on the computer, and there was the news about the assassination of former Japanese President Abe. My Japanese daughter-in-law had just flown from her home in San Francisco to visit her mother in Fukuoka, where I visited them the first summer I was your pastor, in 2002. Abe’s family were among some of her husband Joe, my son’s, students in his teaching of English as a second language over the internet. Joe and Akiko visited service here just a couple of years before CoVid.

It’s just one more example that there’s no way to avoid current events in worshipping God every Sunday. Scripture is an historical book. It was written over a long enough time to deal with the kind of things we’re growing scared of now. Give or take a few details. The psalm for today uses ancient religious beliefs to make the same point we keep making: The wealthy are lording it over the common people and nobody is instilling fair play and healthy morality in the training of the young, and when God calls the gods to order, all agree things can’t go on this way, death is ahead, break-up is inevitable, power is slipping through our fingers daily as a nation.

I’m not echoing the news. I’m citing scripture assigned for this week. How come it’s one and the same thing?

A friend pointed out her memory of New York City after 9-11, where, everywhere you looked, there were signs, “Never forget!” What a god-awful slogan! Encouraging ourselves to get even, rather than facing up to what our fundamental beliefs are for humanity and generosity and helpfulness and equality..... and admitting our part in world troubles.

The people of Israel had been around awhile. It took that for them to get strong enough to be a threat to the big powers of their day, but eventually they became a target, and when they fought back, they were quashed and

their major citizens were dragged off to Babylonia, where during 70 years of captivity, they were able to write down their stories and beliefs and form their basic worship skills enough, so when they were allowed back home again, they could fight it out with those who'd stayed during the exile, perhaps because they were smaller lights in the politics of the day, and so we have the beginnings of modern Judaism, and in a couple of hundred years, we got Christianity. That's the way the world goes, and it's still headed that way, and we've largely forgotten that this very year, so there's a good chance things may get worse first ... so what do we do?

Well, for a long time we've known we should have universal health insurance like the other developed nations. We're still among the very few nations holding back on totally banning nuclear weapons. We've got to face up to the fact that the "right to bear arms" is only in the Constitution because the Founders feared slave insurrections and Indian rebellions and the possibility the English might try to take the colonies back, which they did as we know, in 1812 ...and consequently for us, like other advanced nations, individual weapons among the citizenry are totally indefensible ... just like women's right to control their own reproductive is the only just choice, and the Bible says nothing about life beginning before birth, and that LGBTQ equality is the only fair and proper approach to sex. We've got lots to work on right now ... and if the most powerful nation in the history of the world can't straighten its own affairs better than we are at present, how in the world are we going to do our part influencing other peoples on the global issues that breathe down all necks and doom earthly existence within our next couple of generations if we don't vastly improve our handling of nature? Amos's doom and gloom is peanuts compared to our own honest assessment of things, if we're anything like honest with one another.

I won't even repeat the Gospel lesson for today, or start the first of four Sunday readings on Colossians. If you want to work on those together midweek, we can go after it ... it's been tried before in our routines as Christians, and our founders, the Wesley brothers, highly recommended weekly prayer and Bible study. Just an hour, "How is it with thy soul today? And then study a chapter or a book of Holy Writ for the rest of the hour.

I'll leave us all with, "Use your imagination." Or, as I put it up for a title, "Imagine the truth." Let's pray and practice and experiment and love our way into more hope that we've been showing lately, as a nation or a congregation. We know enough to stay alive and stay busy for a day or two, and after that some fresh insights will come, and soon it will be Sunday and time to come hug each other again. It's really that bad, and good, and simple. Just think about it, and remember how powerful small groups of determined, faithful, truly loving human beings have been in the past. Don't hold back. Don't look away. "Imagine the truth." What can we do? We

know what the Lord's asking us. Imagine working with Jesus in healing the world. It's already started. Get on board.

In Jesus' name we say it. Amen.