

Notes for Next Sunday

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost

The Point of this Week's Readings

Old Testament (Amos 7:7-15). In order to see that Gospel in God's call to Amos, it is important to remember God's reason in sending him to speak: even at this late date, God still desires that his people repent and that he may heal them with forgiveness. Toward this end, God's heart is revealed in the verses immediately prior to our text. Twice in 7:1-6, God declares impending punishment, and twice he relents. Only when Israel refuses to acknowledge that it is "small" (7:2, 5) before him does God's judgment become final.

Epistle (Ephesians 1:3-14). Paul directs the Ephesians away from themselves, teaching them to trust in God's promises in Christ. Pride tempts us to trust in our commitment to God; doubt makes us worry that we are not committed enough. Jesus blesses us spiritually by leading us to repent of sinful pride by the Law and calming our worried hearts through the Gospel.

Gospel (Mark 6:14-29). Coming just after the story about Jesus' rejection in Nazareth, the tragic story of John gives an unmistakable foreshadowing of what awaits Jesus: rejection and even violent hostility. But rejection and violence cannot overcome the risen Lord. His victory over death and the grave shows how wonderfully He can turn such antagonism into life and salvation.

For more in-depth commentary on each reading, read the notes found after each text below.

OLD TESTAMENT – Amos 7:7-15

⁷This is what he showed me: The Lord was standing by a wall that had been built true to plumb, with a plumb line in his hand. ⁸And the LORD asked me, "What do you see, Amos?" "A plumb line," I replied. Then the Lord said, "Look, I am setting a plumb line among my people Israel; I will spare them no longer. ⁹"The high places of Isaac will be destroyed and the sanctuaries of Israel will be ruined; with my sword I will rise against the house of Jeroboam." ¹⁰Then Amaziah the priest of Bethel sent a message to Jeroboam king of Israel: "Amos is raising a conspiracy against you in the very heart of Israel. The land cannot bear all his words. ¹¹For this is what Amos is saying: "Jeroboam will die by the sword, and Israel will surely go into exile, away from their native land." ¹²Then Amaziah said to Amos, "Get out, you seer! Go back to the land of Judah. Earn your bread there and do your prophesying there. ¹³Don't prophesy anymore at Bethel, because this is the king's sanctuary and the temple of the kingdom." ¹⁴Amos answered Amaziah, "I was neither a prophet nor a prophet's son, but I was a shepherd, and I also took care of sycamore-fig trees. ¹⁵But the LORD took me from tending the flock and said to me, 'Go, prophesy to my people Israel.

7:8 plumb line. Builder's tool used to determine a straight, vertical line. In this comparison, the wall represents Israel. Though the Lord originally set up Israel to be right and true, the nation has become crooked and warped. Israel needs to be re-measured by the Lord's plumb line, since only then can things be set right. (TLSB)

7:9 high places ... sanctuaries ... house. The centers of religious and political pretension and of self-righteous pride would be wiped out. (CSB)

7:10 Amaziah conspired. Amaziah charges Amos with inciting insurrection and so overthrowing the dynasty ruling Israel. Apparently, Amos's message was getting through, for Amaziah protests that the land "is not able to bear all his words." (TLSB)

7:11 exile. Amos clearly threatened the nation with this punishment many times. (TLSB)

7:13 never again prophesy at Bethel. Amaziah stops short of forbidding Amos from prophesying altogether. Instead, he forbids Amos from preaching in territories ruled by Jeroboam; he cannot deny that Amos is a true prophet. (TLSB)

7:14 neither a prophet nor a prophet's son. Amos denied any previous connection with the prophets or their disciples. No one had hired him to come and announce judgment on Jeroboam and Israel. (CSB)

EPISTLE – Ephesians 1:3-14

³Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. ⁴For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love ⁵he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will— ⁶to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. ⁷In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace ⁸that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. ⁹And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, ¹⁰to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ. ¹¹In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, ¹²in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. ¹³And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.

1:3 blessed ... blessing. Jewish people used the word “bless” to express both God's kindness to us and our thanks or praise to him. (CSB)

1:3 heavenly realms. Could also be stated “heavenly matters.” A common phrase in Ephesians which is concerned with the ultimate battle between God's forces and the devil's. (TLSB)

1:3 spiritual blessings. God blesses us physically and spiritually. Here Paul likely refers to the blessings given through the Holy Spirit. (TLSB)

1:4 As Israel was once God's chosen people, the Christian Church is now chosen. God's Word leads us to Christ, who is the Book of Life, in whom all are written and elected who are to be saved in eternity. (TLSB)

1:4 holy and blameless. Not a description of our morality as seen by the world, but our status in God's eyes. As Christ is holy and blameless, the perfect sacrifice for our sins (Heb. 7:26; 9:14), we, too, are made holy and blameless by forgiveness through His blood (Eph. 1:7). (TLSB)

1:5 adopted. In the Greco-Roman world, only sons could inherit. Some men ignored their natural children and declared an adopted son as heir. To be adopted by God is to be reborn into His family, made heirs of His kingdom. This happens, when we are all made “sons” (children, heirs) of God through His Son, Jesus. (TLSB)

1:8 lavished on us. In a million years we would not have devised such a plan. Rather, God devised it. (TLSB)

1:9 mystery. Paul defines the mystery primarily as Jesus Himself, whom God revealed as the Messiah to the apostles and prophets, and whom they revealed to the world in their preaching. (TLSB)

1:10 to bring ... under one head. Literally, “put under one head,” i.e., Christ. Because Jesus is both God and man, humankind and God are reconciled in Him. Because all who are baptized are “in Christ,” they are also reconciled to one another, whether Jew or Gentile, male or female, slave or free. (TLSB)

1:14 marked ... with a seal. In those days a seal denoted ownership. – Such faith is sealed and resealed through Word and Sacraments. A stamp on our hand can wear off and so can the seal if we neglect his Word and Sacrament. (CSB)

1:14 deposit. The Christian’s possession of the Holy Spirit is not only evidence of his present salvation but is also a pledge of his future inheritance—and not only a pledge but also the down payment on that inheritance. (CSB)

GOSPEL – Mark 6:14-29

¹⁴ King Herod heard about this, for Jesus’ name had become well known. Some were saying, “John the Baptist has been raised from the dead, and that is why miraculous powers are at work in him.”¹⁵ Others said, “He is Elijah.” And still others claimed, “He is a prophet, like one of the prophets of long ago.”¹⁶ But when Herod heard this, he said, “John, the man I beheaded, has been raised from the dead!”¹⁷ For Herod himself had given orders to have John arrested, and he had him bound and put in prison. He did this because of Herodias, his brother Philip’s wife, whom he had married.¹⁸ For John had been saying to Herod, “It is not lawful for you to have your brother’s wife.”¹⁹ So Herodias nursed a grudge against John and wanted to kill him. But she was not able to,²⁰ because Herod feared John and protected him, knowing him to be a righteous and holy man. When Herod heard John, he was greatly puzzled; yet he liked to listen to him.²¹ Finally the opportune time came. On his birthday Herod gave a banquet for his high officials and military commanders and the leading men of Galilee.²² When the daughter of Herodias came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his dinner guests. The king said to the girl, “Ask me for anything you want, and I’ll give it to you.”²³ And he promised her with an oath, “Whatever you ask I will give you, up to half my kingdom.”²⁴ She went out and said to her mother, “What shall I ask for?” “The head of John the Baptist,” she answered.²⁵ At once the girl hurried in to the king with the request: “I want you to give me right now the head of John the Baptist on a platter.”²⁶ The king was greatly distressed, but because of his oaths and his dinner guests, he did not want to refuse her.²⁷ So he immediately sent an executioner with orders to bring John’s head. The man went, beheaded John in the prison,²⁸ and brought back his head on a platter. He presented it to the girl, and she gave it to her mother.²⁹ On hearing of this, John’s disciples came and took his body and laid it in a tomb.

6:14 King Herod. Mark may here have used the title “king” sarcastically (since Herod was actually a tetrarch – a governor, a subordinate ruler), or perhaps he simply used Herod’s popular title. (CSB)

6:17 Herodias. (A granddaughter of Herod the Great. First she married her uncle, Herod Philip (Herod the Great also had another son named Philip), who lived in Rome. While a guest in their home, Herod Antipas persuaded Herodias to leave her husband for him. Marriage to one’s brother’s wife, while the brother was still living, was forbidden by the Mosaic law. (CSB)

6:22 the daughter of Herodias. This narrative seems to imply that Herodias was biding her time, but that she deliberately sent her daughter into the feast to dance, in order to induce Herod to grant her desire. (Lane)

6:23 up to half my kingdom. Herod did not have authority to dispense with half of his kingdom, but used the phrase as an extravagant expression. (TLSB)

6:26 greatly distressed. This verse shows Herod Antipas at his worst, namely, weak, corrupt, and shallow. He is worried about his honor more than anything else. Indeed, if he broke his oath, never again would he be trusted. (CC)

6:28 head on a platter. This was a grisly display of John's severed head – at a meal no less – illustrates the extreme corruption of Herod and his high society friends. (TLSB)