

"The Politician and the Prophet"

Amos 7:10-17

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Our Redeemer Lutheran Church of Emmett, Idaho

Pastor Michael L. McCoy

Grace, mercy and peace to you in the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

Dear Baptized,

Keep listening and you will hear two men speak.

One occupies an ecclesiastical office of power and authority. He uses his position to be in the presence of the head of state and to speak supporting words to the national leader. In doing so, he is able to advance his own agenda. This is impressive to many - both those within and those without the church. Why? Because he tells both what they want to hear. He is slick, subtle, controlling, engaging, in a position where he is accountable to no one, and of such a persuasion that he will use his office to accomplish his ungodly purposes, all of which will result in the destruction of an already divided people.

The other is a second career guy who is called by the LORD God to speak the Word of God to the people. This man would have been quite content with the simple work he had been doing in the two jobs that he held down. He makes no claim for himself - issues no statement that he was special in and of himself. But, since God called him as His messenger, this second man will speak as he has been told. He did not and he would not compromise the Word.

Such forthright declarations by the second man irritated the first man immensely. The first man has words with the second man. There is the inevitable confrontation and a heated conversation between the two men - one trying all means at his disposal in order to force and enforce his religious plans - the other remaining steadfast in the Word and the Work of the LORD God. The exchange between the men becomes a war of words. So, do you wonder, "What did they say?" Well, it did finally all become quite public and may now be spoken of. Therefore, please listen to the Old Testament Reading for today - to Amos 7:10-17 and hear the word of man and the Word of God from ...

... "The Politician and the Prophet"

"Then Amaziah the priest of Bethel sent to Jeroboam King of Israel, saying, 'Amos has conspired against you in the midst of the house of Israel; the land is not able to bear all his words. For thus Amos has said, 'Jeroboam shall die by the sword, and Israel must go into exile away from his land.'"

And Amaziah said to Amos, 'O seer, go, flee away to the land of Judah, and eat bread there, and prophesy there; but never again prophesy at Bethel, for it is the king's sanctuary, and it is a temple of the kingdom.'

Then Amos answered Amaziah, 'I am no prophet, nor a prophet's son; but I am a herdsman, and a

dresser of sycamore trees, and the LORD took me from following the flock, and the LORD said to me, "Go, prophesy to My people Israel." Now therefore hear the Word of the LORD. You say, "Do not prophesy against Israel, and do not preach against the house of Isaac." Therefore thus says the LORD: "Your wife shall be a harlot in the city, and your sons and your daughters shall fall by the sword, and your land shall be parceled out by line; you yourself shall die in an unclean land, and Israel shall surely go into exile away from its land.""

Thus far the Word of the LORD our God.

A complaint was issued and certainly was received by men for "Surely the LORD God does nothing, without revealing his secret to His servants the prophets" (Amos 3:7). The charges were specific ... gross, manifest violations of the First and Second Commandment ... no other gods and no misuse of the Name of the LORD God. "Therefore thus says the LORD, the God of hosts, the Lord: ... 'I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer Me your burnt offerings and cereal offerings, I will not accept them, and the peace offerings of your fattened beasts I will not look upon'" (Amos 5:16 & 21-22).

This is the Divine reaction to the grave, deadly sin of syncretism. One example of syncretism is when there is an interfaith service in which other gods, in addition to the One True God, receive sacrifices, or are invoked, or are worshipped. Among the gods in the days of Amos were two gold calves [one located in Bethel (1 King 12:26ff)], statuettes of Ishtar, Sakkuth, the star-god named Kaiwan and various images that the people made for themselves. There were other gods - Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, Chemosh the god of Moab, and Milcom the god of the Ammonites - as well as the clerics of the same.

So wretched had these polluted infestations become that the city of Bethel, a word that means "house of God," had become a field of man's dreams where syncretistic services and activities took place as other gods were invoked, worshipped and sacrificed to. A line-up of pagan pitch-men ascended the mound, that is, the high places to deliver a legion of deadly words that tickled the ears of the crowds and piqued the natural hearts of man. So atrocious were these blasphemous sins that when Jehovah offered His gift of repentance, He said "to the house of Israel, 'Seek Me and live; but do not seek Bethel, and do not enter into Gilgal or cross over to Beer-sheba; for Gilgal shall surely go into exile; and Bethel shall come to nought.'" (Amos 5:4-5).

Thus Amos told the people, "Seek the LORD and live, lest He break out like fire in the house of Joseph, and it devour, with none to quench it for Bethel" (Amos 5:6). As a consequence of their syncretism and faithlessness, God declared that He would permit them to be taken into exile beyond Damascus. And then the former herdsman and tree-tender continued to relay the Word of the Lord, "Behold, ... 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" (Amos 7:9).

That did it! The intolerance of Amos the Prophet would not be tolerated by Amaziah the Priest of Bethel. This religious politician would not put a stop to the syncretism that was taking place in the House of God. In fact, he approved and authorized, defended and supported those who departed from the One Way and who walked together in a syncretistic synod. The Politician became like so many before him and as so many since - and even unto this day - that "though they know God's decree that those who do such things deserve to die, they not only do them but approve those who practice them" (Romans 1:32). Amos must be dealt with and if it took the clout of the cleric or the

might of the state to silence the Prophet, well, it would be done, even if the Politician must massage the truth in order to accomplish his purpose.

"Amaziah the priest of Bethel sent to Jeroboam King of Israel, saying, 'Amos has conspired against you in the midst of the house of Israel; the land is not able to bear all his words. For thus Amos has said, 'Jeroboam shall die by the sword, and Israel must go into exile away from his land.'" O dear king, we have a problem with a certain man broadcasting a message of treason. A certain prophet, a man named Amos, is among us saying that you are going to die by the sword and that your people will be taken away into a foreign land. As a faithful member of both church and state, I just thought you'd like to know. If there is anything I can do to help you, please, you only need to get word back to me and I will help you.

Amaziah very shrewdly does not stress Amos' denunciation of Israel's apostasy from the Lord, does not mention his pleas for repentance, nor his pleadings with God (vv. 2, 5). He deliberately changes [Amos'] general threat (v. 9b) into a personal threat against Jeroboam (v. 11). As a good politician he mentions not his own interest in the deportation of Amos, but only his patriotic concern for the welfare of the community: "The land is not able to bear all his word." People were beginning to listen to him, perhaps even daring to criticize prevailing conditions, to speak of the need of reform. Such action, of course, seemed like high treason to the priest of Bethel. To allow a man like Amos to continue his activity would endanger the welfare of the state, would spell ruin and disaster to the kingdom. Amaziah, a blind leader of the blind!

"The Minor Prophets" by Theodore Laetsch

As all this took place, the offerings were decreasing and there was a great possibility that the people would by-pass the politician's places for their offerings there in Bethel and Dan. They might go elsewhere and programs would have to be cut. Staff would need to be reduced and the power base would begin to be eroded. Amaziah could not let the people continue to hear the truth.

The Bible does not report any reply by Jeroboam King of Israel. The Scriptures do, however, record what the priestly politician did next. "And Amaziah said to Amos, 'O seer, go, flee away to the land of Judah, and eat bread there, and prophesy there; but never again prophesy at Bethel, for it is the king's sanctuary, and it is a temple of the kingdom.'" Look, you "troubler of Israel" [1 Kings 18:16-17] if you are unwilling to get with the program here at Bethel - if you are not able to sway the prevailing ecclesiastical opinion - or if you are not able to persuade the majority of the people of your message - or you can not change the collective will of the synod, then you must go. Never speak your message again at this place. This is not your grandfather's church. This is the king's sanctuary ... the royal purple palace ... a temple of Jeroboam's kingdom. Amos, shut your mouth! Go away! Flee! Never return.

The Prophet's reply? Ponder first, what Amos did not say. Twice before in the 7th chapter of Amos, the LORD planned to call a day of judgment. Twice before the Prophet petitioned God beseeching His mercy (verses 2 & 5). Twice before Jehovah relented and the execution was stayed. Twice, but not thrice. Listen as the faithful Amos remains steadfast in the Word and Work of the LORD God Almighty:

"Then Amos answered Amaziah, 'I am no prophet, nor a prophet's son; but I am a herdsman, and a dresser of sycamore trees, and the LORD took me from following the flock, and the LORD said to me, "Go, prophesy to My people Israel.'" Now therefore hear the Word of the LORD. You say, "Do

not prophesy against Israel, and do not preach against the house of Isaac." Therefore thus says the LORD: "Your wife shall be a harlot in the city, and your sons and your daughters shall fall by the sword, and your land shall be parceled out by line; you yourself shall die in an unclean land, and Israel shall surely go into exile away from its land."

Which do you hear today and this day? - a faithless politician? - a faithful prophet? The account from Amos provides a few ways for us to tell the difference. Consider a couple of them.

Concerning the state of the church, the faithless politician will spin the statistics and make things sound the way it's best for him. There will be emotional pleas and smooth theatrics. Like the message to King Jeroboam, the hearer will be getting only a slanted account. The politician will keep the historical record from the people and will use a system of man-made laws and by-laws to rule and accumulate even more power. The faithful prophet will tell you the Truth of God and nothing but the Truth in exposing the lie of man. He will direct the people away from ignorance - that is, from being ignorant of what is taking place in the Church and encourage them to investigate and examine all these things that are happening and comparing them with the Word of God.

Concerning the prevailing winds of the day, the faithless politician will go with the flow and, in worldly love, will succumb to the cries of the Christ-less culture and succor the masses on tolerance and license. He will point to the polls and brandish about the statistics of his approval ratings. The faithful prophet will often find himself opposed by many and supported by a remnant. Regardless, he will abide by the Apostolic charge to "preach the Word, be urgent in season and out of season, convince, rebuke, and exhort, be unfailing in patience and in teaching. For the time will come when the people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own likings, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander into myths. As for you, always be steady, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfil your ministry" (2 Timothy 4:2-5).

Concerning the Word of God, the false politician will speak words of manageable law and conditional gospel. Thus the Law of God is softened, diluted and neglected as you are directed to your own works as the basis for the eternal favor of the Almighty. Salvation by the grace of God through faith in Christ is replaced by a system of meritorious works, good intentions and devilish deeds, which is a conditional gospel, that is, "a different gospel - not that there is another gospel, but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the Gospel of Christ" (Galatians 1:6-7).

The faithful prophet will preach and teach the Law of God that always accuses the old sinful nature in each of us. This Word of the Lord is proclaimed in all its sternness and severity. He will declare the consequences of sin ... Divine condemnation, eternal death, everlasting destruction. He will not exclude himself or his fellow, faithful pastors from such declarations, saying, "even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we preached to you, let him be accursed" (Galatians 1:8).

The faithful, called man of God will also proclaim the Lord's Good News and teach the Gospel of Emmanuel; that is, the Word of God that always comforts the repentant soul who looks to Christ crucified and risen. He will tell the contrite soul, "Fear not, for the Incarnate Son of God atoned for all your sins - that Jesus was condemned in your place - that Jesus silently bore the penalty for all the transgressions of your mouth - that Jesus died your death in your place - that God's Only-Begotten Son thought on you when He offered His Blood on behalf of your sins of thought - that Christ's

active obedience in fulfilling the Law is accomplished for your active disobedience - that the Lamb of God's passive obedience on the cross takes away the sins of your passive disobedience - that in Jesus' Resurrection your death has been defeated - that in His gift of Baptism you have been 'born from above' (John 3:3) and made an heir of an 'inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you' (1 Peter 1:4) - that, according to His Word, 'as far as the east is from the west, so far does He remove our transgressions from us' (Psalm 103:12) - that the Cup of Blessing which we bless is a participation in the Blood of Christ (1 Corinthians 10:16), the sprinkled Blood that speaks graciously (Hebrews 12:24), the Blood shed for you for the remission of sins - that God has redeemed you and called you by name and declared that you are His own dearly beloved - He will never leave you nor forsake you.

The faithful soul will never perish and the One true Church will never perish. That is God's promise. There is, however, no such promise for a particular nation, district, land, synod or congregation. The sorely divided people would suffer the consequences of their religious leader's unbelief. The faithless politician, along with his many supporters in the religious assembly didn't want the Word of God preached in its truth and purity - in a frightening judgment on such an expression of unbelief, what Amaziah and his supporters wanted was precisely what he and many others received. The Presence of the Lord departed from them and the nation was taken into exile.

Or, as the Almighty Jehovah declared through the faithful prophet, "'Behold, the days are coming,' says the LORD God, 'when I will send a famine on the land; not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord. They shall wander from sea to sea, and from north to east; they shall run to and fro, to seek the Word of the LORD, but they shall not find it" (Amos 8:11-12).

We conclude with a couple of 'what would he do and say ifs?'

What would the faithless politician do and say if the prophet departed from the pure Word of the LORD God, no longer renounced unionism and syncretism of every description, and began following the leader? The politician would open his arms wide and say, "Welcome!" What would the faithful prophet do and say if the politician confessed his sins, repented of them and trusted in the LORD God? The prophet would raise his hand, make the sign of the cross, and announce what you hear every Sunday in the Divine Service - you are forgiven of all your sins in the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.