

EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST  
Amos 7:10-17; 1 Timothy 3:1-7; Mark 6:7-13

*Everyone has a word of god; the Christian just doesn't write his own.*

Everyone has a word of god; the Christian just doesn't write his own. Luther says the heart of man is an idol factory. Everyone has a word of god; the Christian just doesn't write his own.

St. Paul warned the young pastor, St. Timothy, not to be too disappointed when many people reject the clear preaching of God's Word, both law and gospel, choosing instead pastors and teachers who will tell them what they want to hear—and the phone book is full of those who will do so—who will confirm their twisted and self-serving sense of right and wrong, feed their damning sense of entitlement before God and His throne. He wrote:

*For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.*

And no one is immune to such a temptation. All of us have a heart, and as Luther said, the human heart is an idol factory. All of us, according to our sinful nature, want to hear what our sinful nature wants to hear, to have our sinful passions stoked, our sin excused and even called good.

It wasn't only in St. Timothy's time that men would seek preachers to scratch their itching ears. It had happened well before then, even as it happens today, in Old Testament times as well. In our first lesson we see it on full display. Jeroboam II was a wicked king, as his father had been. He ruled in the Northern Kingdom, and he ruled not according to God's will, the Old Testament law, but according to his own whim and fancy, letting idolatry flourish and the true worship of the true God fall by the wayside. And to make it all worse, he'd surrounded himself with prophets to tell him it was all fine and dandy, all good and well, all, yes, even godly. Amaziah was one of those prophets, well-schooled in courtly manners and flattering rhetoric, serving for the salary, unable to understand why Amos would possibly want to upset the king with such an impolite and disconcerting, even if true, prophesy.

Amos, however, was a shepherd and a farmer, raised far from kingly courts. He spoke Plattdeutsch, drove a four-wheel drive, probably a Ford if it worked, drank his beer from the bottle, maybe picked his teeth, ate what he grew or killed, had dirt under his fingernails. He was Saginaw Valley, not Lansing capitol steps. He was no expert on regal manners is what I'm trying to say. Yet he was what mattered most to God: a godly man. He had a Word of God, and he hadn't written it himself. He was a Christian, awaiting the coming of the Messiah. And God called him to go to Jeroboam and to his false prophets and to denounce their idolatry and corruption and sumptuousness, not to scratch their itching ears but to box them.

Our second lesson gives us the qualifications of a pastor. Why are there so many qualifications, here and elsewhere? Because God's Word is not something to entrust to some noob, ne'er-do-well, or ninny. God's Word is our Word of God, written by His prophets and apostles and at His Spirit's direction, and those who preach it must be willing to do just that and let the cards fall where they may, not looking for trouble, but willing to bear whatever brunt might come by telling it like it is, yes, always in love, but also without compromise. Times change, but God is not bound by time, and His will is not only good, wise, and loving, but timeless, not shifting like the shadows or the sands—and no one who has ever born the cross or tasted true trial would want it to—and so His servants must not be shiftless, but like Amos steadfast, like it or not,

on good days and bad, when the pews are packed and when they thin precisely because of that Word, when people listen or when they scoff, when false teachers yield or when they rage, whatever the case, whenever the time, speaking only that which God has given them, not in some superstitious or schmaltzy way, but in clear words on a page.

In our Holy Gospel, Jesus sends the first ministers of the Word out. He sent them out utterly dependent on God. They were not to bring their bank accounts with them, but to live by God's provision, through the support of the Word, scant as it might have been at times. They were to enter a house and preach, and if the people listened, they were to preach and teach some more, to catechize. And if the people didn't listen, or if they ceased to listen, they were to rise and go, still dependent on God to bless His Word and to care for them as God saw fit, shaking the dust off their feet. And their message was simple. They were not called to confirm people in their unbelief, or to woo them with rhetoric, or to try to make Jesus or the gospel popular through crafty schemes, but simply *proclaim that people should repent*, that is, confess their sins and receive Jesus' forgiveness. And in so doing they exercised power over the devil and demons, the very ones who work furiously to oppose the saving message of our Lord and Him crucified for our sins.

I'm not a farmer or shepherd. We have a garden, but I'd be a lot skinner without Meijer. On top of that, I'm allergic to wool. Hopefully I have some manners, but my wife would tell you I'm not going to teach a charm school anytime soon. Either way, God has called me to be your pastor, and so like it or not, what matters most is that I be just that and do what God has called me to do, that I tell you His Word, like it or not, on good days and bad, rain or shine, to bid you to build on this rock, not to sculpt it or shape it in your own image, as pastors before me have done, and Lord willing, unless Jesus comes first, pastors after me will do here as well. And unless I serve in such a capacity and in such a way, like me much as you might—and I'm sure you do—I'm no good to you.

Don't be fooled by the winds of the world. Something isn't right because it feels good. If "feels good" was the sign of goodness than the euphoria that sometimes precedes life-threatening sicknesses would be a bellwether of good days, not hospital stays. And something isn't right because it seems like fate threw it in your lap. Our enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, carefully crafting and arranging temptation for us, determined to ensnare us in such supposed fate. And something isn't right because it conjures the warm fuzzies of puppy love in our sinful hearts. We are born of the flesh and thus prone apart from Christ to love the most fallen, fading, cancerous things, and puppy love is passing, leaving third grade girlfriends in its wake. And something isn't right because we want it to be right. That's imagination, not reality, and leads to destruction. Something is right because God says it is right, and you need not look far to find out what He's said.

Our Verse of the Day gets to the point. "Alleluia. *The Word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it.* Alleluia" (Deuteronomy 30:14). Don't take that Word for granted, for the same Word that calls out and condemns your sins is the same Word that sets you free from them, that gives you Jesus born of Mary, crucified under Pontius Pilate, risen and ascended all for you and your salvation.

Everyone has a word of god; the Christian just doesn't write his own. Be what you were baptized. Hold to God's Word of God and not your own. Pray the Lord of the Church for many more Amoses, and be on guard for Amaziahs. Amaziahs might tell you what you want to hear, but Amoses tell you what God wants you to hear, and when you stand before Him, it will be according to what He wanted you to hear that you will be judged. Amen.