

"The Perfect Preacher"

Amos 7:10-15

July 12, 2015

7th Sunday After Pentecost

Contrary to what you may think, this sermon entitled, *The Perfect Preacher*, does not claim to be Pastor Schlund's resume nor his autobiography. Oh, that it were! He says he would settle for even being a good preacher. What does that mean though - to be a good preacher? I'm sure you all have your own ideas what makes a good preacher. Some would say a good preacher means a pastor who is a dynamic public speaker. Some would say a good preacher means a pastor who tells memorable stories, emotional anecdotes, and good jokes in his sermons. Many would say a good preacher is a pastor who can say positive things and make me feel good about myself when I leave. Many might say that a good preacher is one who is done preaching in under 15 minutes.

However a pastor can be criticized as being a poor preacher if he talks too negatively about things like sin and the need for the hearers to change their ways of thinking and doing things, especially if his message hits too close to home. He will be labeled as being "too judgmental". And woe to the pastor who actually speaks of hell and eternal damnation for those who refuse to believe in Jesus Christ! He will be labeled as "narrow minded" and "insensitive" in our enlightened times.

If a pastor is judged to be a lousy preacher because the message is not liked, people will react in different ways. Some church members will complain amongst themselves or to a local pastor living near their church. Some people will criticize the pastor for his overly negative messages and blame him for the lack of growth or strength in the congregation. Some will even go to the lengths of trying to remove the pastor from office for his supposedly bad sermons or quit the church and go to a church where they get a sermon that they like better.

Since preachers are only human, such negative actions will affect them. Some will even change their messages so that they are better liked and so that people in their congregations will consider them to be good preachers. The messages may be less negative and, being filled with warm fuzzy stories and pop psychology, will make people feel much better about themselves. But have

they become better preachers? Not necessarily according to God's Word. We don't often hear a sermon based on a small Old Testament book like Amos. But our text today from Amos addresses the problem directly of what makes a good preacher.

To understand this text, you have to understand about the history of Israel. God had led the people of Israel out of slavery in Egypt under Moses and into the Promised Land which He gave them. The twelve tribes of Israel formed a united nation for many years, through the reigns of Kings Saul, David, and Solomon. However, when Solomon's son, Rehoboam, took the throne, there was a rebellion which led to the establishment of two separate nations: Israel to the north with Jeroboam as king and Judah to the south with Rehoboam as king.

During the time of our text, the northern kingdom of Israel was very prosperous. Business was booming and military victories were helping expand the country's territory. However, corresponding to this outward success was a spiritual emptiness. It was a time of idolatry, extravagant indulgences in luxurious living, immorality, corruption of the judicial system, and the oppression of the poor.

(Sounds a little like today, doesn't it?)

Upon the scene came the prophet Amos. Amos was not a professional prophet, nor was he an advisor in the king's court as Isaiah had been, nor was he a priest in the temple as Jeremiah had been. He was a simple shepherd from the village of Tekoa, located six miles south of Bethlehem in Judah.

Amos left the southern kingdom of Judah and traveled to the northern kingdom of Israel with a message. It was not a happy message designed to make people feel good about themselves. He laid before the people a list of their sins which I had previously mentioned: idolatry, immorality, and lack of concern for the poor and down trodden. He called the people of Israel to repentance - to abandon their sinful life style and turn to God and His way of living. The people, having become complacent in their outward success, refused to listen and basically ignored Amos.

So Amos laid out God's punishment for their sin and refusal to repent. God spoke through Amos and said, "I will never again pass by them; 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 went on to say: "Jeroboam shall die by the sword, and Israel must go into exile, away from his land. In other words, their temples of idolatrous worship would be destroyed. The dynasty of King Jeroboam would be destroyed and he himself would die. The nation of Israel would be carried away in exile.

Notice the reaction the message received. Instead of causing the people to fall on their knees in fear and repentance, to change their ways, and turn back to God because of the message, they got upset with the messenger. Amaziah, the priest at Bethel, blamed Amos for conspiring to bring about the evil consequences mentioned, instead of recognizing them to be God's punishment. He called for a more positive message. He said, "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," implying that any messages spoken there should be nice ones which favored the king and his administration. And he got rid of Amos by kicking him out of the country.

Now, despite the fact that Amos's message was not positive and not well received, he was still a good preacher. Why? Our text says, "Amos answered Amaziah, "I am no prophet, nor a prophet's son, but I was a herdsman, and a dresser of sycamore figs. But the LORD took me from following the flock and the LORD said to me, `Go, prophesy to my people Israel.'" In other words, the Lord chose Him to speak. He did not choose himself. And Amos spoke what the Lord commanded him. He did not invent the message nor conform it to the people's preferences to get a good reaction. He was a good preacher because he was faithful to the Lord.

As God sent His prophets of old and as Jesus sent out His disciples two by two as we heard in our Gospel lesson last Sunday, so God chooses men from cities, villages, and countryside and sends them to congregations like this one. And, by the standard He measured His spokesmen in the past, so God measures His spokesmen today. One is not a good preacher because he speaks dynamically, tells interesting stories, or makes you feel good about yourselves. A good preacher is one who speaks the Word of the Lord faithfully, clearly, and completely.

A good preacher will proclaim God's Law to you. God's Law requires you to live in perfect accord with His will -- not your own will, not the world's will, and not any other standard. As His creation, you are required to live by His standards. A holy and righteous God promises punishment to all of His creatures who willfully or accidentally transgress His commands. "The wages of sin is death", the Scriptures say, both the death of your body on this earth and the eternal death of your soul in the fires of hell.

This is not a happy message to make you feel good about yourselves. You may react like Amaziah did in our text -- criticize and complain about the preacher, seek to get rid of such a preacher, or seek another preacher who has "happier" messages. Yet a good preacher must proclaim this word of Law and threat of punishment to you. Why? Suppose you go to a doctor and, during the course of the examination, he finds cancer in you. Suppose he didn't want to give you such a depressing message and chose, instead, to give you a happier message by telling you, "You are in good health!" Would we call him a good doctor? No! He would be guilty of medical malpractice. By withholding that vital information about your disease, it would not make you any healthier. Ignorance is not bliss in this situation. You would still certainly die. The doctor needs to tell you the honest truth about your disease so that you are aware of it, turn from it, and can take the necessary treatment to be cured.

In the same way, a good preacher, in studying God's Word and observing the lives of the people in his care, will see sin. He cannot withhold this vital information so he doesn't offend you or not make you feel good about yourself. That would be spiritual malpractice. You will still die in your sin and spend eternity in hell. A good preacher needs to confront you with your sin - in a general way in the sermon and privately when those sins become evident. Then you will be aware of your spiritual disease, turn from it, and turn to the treatment necessary to cure you.

However, a good preacher is not one who only preaches "hellfire and damnation" (although some think *that* is a good preacher). There is good news as well. Amos desperately wanted to share good news of God's forgiveness and restoration from exile in Assyria. Eventually, he did in the last

chapter of his book where he promised those who had been beaten down by their sin and its punishment, "In that day I will restore David's fallen tent. I will repair its broken places, restore its ruins, and build it as it used to be,...I will plant Israel in their own land, never again to be uprooted from the land I have given them," says the LORD your God." (Amos 9:11,15) Those who trusted in the Lord and His promises received these blessings.

In the same way, a good preacher today will also preach Good News. A good preacher brings the cure for your spiritual disease. He will proclaim to you Jesus Christ, not himself. By virtue of Jesus Christ's perfect life on your behalf and His death on a cross in your place, every wrong ever done in your account with God has been removed and every blessing possible has been added to it. He forgives you for your sins. He gives you the very righteousness of Jesus Christ with which to stand before Him. He establishes and maintains a relationship with you in this life through the Holy Spirit who dwells within you, despite the pain, suffering, and all sorts of problems. And He promises you, by virtue of Christ's resurrection, a life with Him in heaven after death which will be free of pain, suffering, and every problem. It is as our epistle reading sums up for us today:

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight.... In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory."

A good preacher brings you that "word of truth, the gospel of your salvation" every Sunday and in every way possible. That Word comes to you in the water of Holy Baptism which initiates you into all of God's blessings. That Word comes to you in the sermon where the Gospel, like a multifaceted diamond, is shared with you in all of its various facets and in all of its brilliance to encourage you in your faith. That Word is brought to you in the Lord's Supper which nourishes you in your spiritual life with God. And all of these things - Baptism, Preaching, and the Lord's Supper - are not mere

symbols *for* nor mere explanations *about* God's blessings, but they actually convey to you in water, speech, bread, and wine the very forgiveness of your sin, the removal of your guilt, the strength to live this life, and the assurance of eternal life. For the word spoken by God through His chosen preachers is able to accomplish that which it promises.

One preacher was asked what his main job was and he replied, "My job is to comfort the afflicted and to afflict the comfortable." That is, it is the job of a preacher to afflict those who are comfortable in their sins by the stern declaration of God's Law and the punishment it will deliver with the hope of turning people away from their sin to God. It is the job of the preacher then to comfort those afflicted by their sin and the guilt it produces by the joyful proclamation of the Gospel and the forgiveness and other blessings it produces. This is what the Amos and all the other prophets in the Old Testament did. This is what the apostles of Jesus Christ did. This is what Pastor Schlund attempts to do here every Sunday. Then, regardless of whether or not he is a dynamic speaker, whether or not he has interesting stories or funny jokes, and whether or not you view the messages as "positive" or not, he will be a good preacher in the eyes of God and for your benefit. That is his goal. That is his prayer. Amen