



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

15th Sunday 2018 (Bodmin/Padstow/ Wadebridge/Tintagel)

Readings: Amos 7:12-15, Psalm 84:9-14, Ephesians 1:3-14, Mark 6: 7-13

The Prophet Amos

Forty two years ago next month I left my last secular job in Whitehall and shipped up, bright eyed and bushy tailed, at the Anglican Seminary in Cambridge. The call to ministry had been too strong and too insistent to resist and I was now keen to get on and follow Jesus wherever He led.

My tutor gave me my very first task and I found myself, puzzled and intrigued, in the college library (not a place that had seen very much of me during my first degree) researching the obscure eighth century BC minor prophet Amos. It was not a book that had ever really come to my attention before.

Amos had become suddenly very popular because of his eloquent critique of social injustice. In a time of delicious prosperity the rich had grown richer and the gap between them and the poor had dramatically widened. Plus ca change.

But there is much more to Amos than that. A little background.

Amos is not a professional prophet. A prophet is someone who speaks the Word of God but, by this stage of Israel's development, being a prophet had become a 'nice little earner', belonging to a guild and telling your wealthy clients what they wanted to hear – top of the range were the court prophets, advisers to the king. Amos, in contrast, was

a shepherd and a fig farmer. He just happened to be raised up by God to speak to His people.

Amos wasn't even local. He belonged to the little rump remnant kingdom of Judah – the two tribes that were left after the schism that followed the death of Solomon. He was sent to preach to Israel, the ten tribes of the northern kingdom. Under Jeroboam II the Northern kingdom, had conquered Syria, Moab, and Ammon, and restored much of the Solomonic empire. But the subsequent peace and prosperity was accompanied by widespread corruption and the oppression of the poor. The free association with pagan neighbours meant that worship was now not centred on God but on heathen idolatry.

The golden calf was back in business and materialism ruled.

Amos' task was to call the nation back to God and warn them of the consequences of their present path. His book abounds in powerful imagery. The rich men are pictured carousing on their ivory couches while the poor are bought and sold. Their womenfolk are 'fat cows of Bashan' whose luxurious lives are funded by economic oppression. The Lord condemns their pageants and pomps and feasts. He wants, in the words of Amos, 'justice to roll down like the waters, righteousness like an ever flowing stream'.

Today's brief extract sees Amos encounter Amaziah, the high priest of the royal sanctuary of Bethel. It is the equivalent of Westminster Abbey and here is some hick from a small town in the deep south having the temerity to say there is something wrong with the country, something wrong with the governing class, something wrong with the financial chicanery that passes for an economic system- in short, the whole godless shooting match. Understandably, as equivalent to the Archbishop of Canterbury, Amaziah does not want this gobby yokel

spoiling solemn evensong - never mind a royal wedding - with such inconvenient truths.

Why do we still read and attend to this obscure historical encounter?

Several reasons.

Firstly it is the Word of God. Thus it is both historically important but contains eternal truth.

Second we know that the Word of God is incarnated in Jesus so the call to righteousness, return and salvation is a constant feature of the love of God for His people. It is why Jesus instructs His disciples today to go out and preach repentance. The New Testament is hidden in the Old.

Third we cannot read Amos and be unaware of the resonance for our time and our culture. In the long peace and prosperity that western Europe has enjoyed for more than my lifetime, the nations of historic Christendom have collectively abandoned God. Less than one in twenty attend any worship and many of them irregularly. The consequences are immeasurable and catastrophic. The abandonment of the Faith means the abandonment of the truth that informs it and the destruction of the ethic and mores that flow from it. We have replaced Christianity with what Gordon Brown used to refer to as 'British Values' (sic). This is a vast porridge of meaningless clichés that masks a surrender to materialism, bogus sentimentalism and unrestrained hedonism. This trinity of defeats is, quite literally, mortal to our society and our civilisation.

The idolatry of materialism infests the Old Testament and brings down the ire of the prophets. It does so because in materialism 'if matter is all there is then you don't matter at all'. Materialism is the founding

principle of the culture of death which St. John Paul II so regularly identified. It is the principle behind the murderous calculations of Marat and the tumbrils of revolutionary France (283000 need to die to secure the revolution). Materialism is the principle behind the killings field of Cambodia (Year Zero), the principle behind the death camps of the Nazis and greater slaughter of the Soviets and the Maoists right through to the state sanctioned destruction of the unborn and the gathering enthusiasm for a cull of the aged and infirm.

The surrender of our culture to materialism and its murderous immorality is predicated on the slippery language of the lobby groups. They identify their wickedness as 'compassion'. Never can there have been a more grotesque abuse of language. Those who oppose their evil are ushered away from the public arena and the airwaves. Tame 'prophets', convenient clergy, are ushered in to bless the moral obscenities of our age.

Like the Israelites of old hedonism has replaced heroism. Gratification has exiled godliness. Profit has trumped prophecy.

Our task remains the same as that of Amos, the same as that of the Disciples. To call the people back to God, back to the truth, back to the blessing of both life and life eternal. No prophet or disciple wants to see his people die or be lost in exile. A prophet's heart is always for the salvation of Man for he speaks for the loving heart of God... and so must we.

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