

Amos 7:7-17

Psalm 82

Colossians 1: 1- 14

Luke 10:25-37

These sermon notes were prepared before the sermon was delivered and so do not transcribe the actual sermon word for word

As always the three readings are provided each Sunday to give us an opportunity to look at ourselves and perhaps to discover ourselves in relation to God.

This week they give us some insights into ourselves as ‘Church’; for each of them raises issues for us in our understanding of ourselves as a church community.

Starting with Paul’s letter to the Colossians, although not necessarily written by Paul, it is written in the style and context of Paul, a church leader to the emerging church at Colossae.

Today we have just heard the opening of the letter and over the next three weeks we’ll be hearing further extracts from the same letter; but the opening is an important starting point.

Pauls addresses his letter “*To the saints and faithful brothers and sisters in Christ in Colossae*”; and how we hear that address is an important reflection for us to be aware of.

“*To the saints and faithful brothers and sisters in Christ in Colossae*” could refer to one body, a community of people, all of whom are ‘saints’ and ‘brothers and sisters’; it could also refer to one body made up of two groups, the first being ‘saints’ and the second being ‘brothers and sisters’; and likewise it could refer to one body made up of three distinct groups, ‘saints’, ‘faithful brothers’ and ‘sisters’.

Looking back at a patriarchal church history it would be easy to argue that the model of three distinct groups seems to have been borne out in the unfolding of the church.

Perhaps Paul’s Trinitarian address is directed to an ‘ideal’, and reflects what a church might actually grow into.

The description of “saints’ in the New Testament and in Paul’s writings was generally applied to those who were members of the church community, and in those early years it was not reserved for those who satisfied some holiness test imposed by the church authorities.

However, rather than continuing to explore the evolving history of the church, it is worthwhile looking at ourselves in this church community; and as we do so, we might become aware of the differences we have, and the diversity of the parts that constitute the one body that is our St Paul’s church community.

We are very different to the communities that Paul was addressing in his letters; however we might consider for ourselves the wholeness that is contained in Paul’s Trinitarian address.

Do we today even aspire to being addressed as ‘saints; visibly making evident our holiness, or do we keep all that well hidden?

“Faithful” is more often used to describe than to describe communities, and yet it still resonates, it is still a characteristic that has currency in the present age. So how do we understand, and how do we engage our faithfulness to each other and to this community?

“Brothers and sisters” hold a special relatedness, do we see each other, or seek each other as family?

What is being asked of us as we open Paul’s letter; and if it is not addressed to us, what changes might we consider so that it is?

Paul sees the church community as one body seeking to *“be filled with the knowledge of God’s will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, 10 so that you may lead lives worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, as you bear fruit in every good work and as you grow in the knowledge of God.”*

Is that how we see this community?

Is this our place in which to *“bear fruit in every good work and as we[you] grow in the knowledge of God.”*?

In the first reading Amos sees, or is shown a vision, and very much the same vision that Paul sees for the church. The first reading therefore gives us an invitation to awaken the ‘Amos’ in ourselves.

In the narrative Amos is called away from his life as a farmer, most probably a landowner in a time of prosperity for Israel, and called to become a voice for justice.

Rather than us being disturbed by the literal movement in the narrative, we can see this movement as a process of reordering life priorities and those things of the world that hold our attention. Such a movement is very much in line with Paul’s encouragement to the early church.

As we contemplate our standing with Amos we might consider where we are in relation to the divine plumb line; and those other plumb lines that hang across our lives, the plumb line of St Paul’s, the plumb line, or plumb lines of Australia and the global plumb lines that advertise for our alignment.

Worldly plumb lines have the following definition:

plumb line *n.*

1. A line from which a weight is suspended to determine verticality or depth.
2. A line regarded as directed exactly toward the earth's center of gravity.

However the Divine plumb line that Amos sees holds a deeper understanding; why was he shown a plumb line when the narrative speaks of laying waste and of desolation.

The plumb line is a tool to build with; it provides a measure for alignment, and makes clear for Amos the out-of-alignment in the world he inhabits.

It also holds a promise of rebuilding, of creating that which can be aligned, that which has integrity with the Divine.

Again, we're asked to consider the plumb lines we use to align our lives and the building of the one body that is the church in this community.

For those who want to explore the first reading further consider the place of the church in the narrative, and it is to be found in verse 10: "*Then Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, sent to King Jeroboam of Israel, saying, "Amos has conspired against you in the very centre of the house of Israel; the land is not able to bear all his words."*

The prophet and the priest are in conflict, so when we look at rebuilding in alignment with the Divine, we are changing both the world and the church.

That same thread is also found in today's gospel reading; and it is opened up by the question from one who seeks to find eternal life.

Pause and consider what questions bring us to church?

It is a "lawyer" who asks the question, and in those times a lawyer would mean someone well versed in the religious laws, in the Torah and the Hebrew scriptures. The lawyer is able to correctly answer his own question according to the religious law, but seeks further clarity in terms of defining the neighbour whom is required to love with his whole heart.

The parable of the good Samaritan is then used to illustrate the reality that is both behind and beyond the law that the lawyer is already familiar with.

The priest and the Levite represent the religious leaders, and so too the cultural leaders who governed the society in those times, they represent those who keep the law and maintain the tradition.

The Samaritans were despised, they were also a people of faith who kept the law, but were very much outsiders and aliens to the people of Israel; so much so that even at the end of the narrative the lawyer can't name the Samaritan and can only refer to his actions.

The Samaritan represents the Amos in the story, he represents the 'Saint' that Pauls is writing to, and perhaps he represents the being that we aspire to here in this community....

Priests and Levites are faithful, they are in many respects brothers (and in the present age brothers and sisters), we might well see ourselves in their reflection, but we also see and know that it is the Samaritan, and the Amos that builds using the plumb line of Divine justice, the Samaritan interprets the law in the light and life of God's love.

Before we consider the question asked in the gospel; , "*And who is my neighbour* " we might first seek to discover who we really are.

Peace be with You