

Eighth Sunday of Pentecost 10 July 2016

[Amos 7:7-17; Psalm 82; Colossians 1: 1- 14; Luke 10:25-37](#) Vanderbilt

[Proper 10C / Ordinary 15C / Pentecost +8 Jul 10, 2016](#) from Textweek

The first reading from the book of Amos feels like it was written by Shakespeare, and it's easy to picture the players coming on stage one after the other to say their craftily scripted pieces and to give the audience something to really think about.

We read it today as a one act play that is designed to present to us the interplay between the State, the Church and the everyday person.

Very cleverly, Amos is first on stage and is presented at the start of the play as the prophet who has divine visions and one through whom the voice of God is spoken. Amos clearly has the lead role and a powerful role in opening the play.

Next on stage, is the Church, in the figure of "*Amaziah, the priest of Bethel*"; and immediately we are drawn beyond the figure of Amos, for Amaziah strides powerfully to centre stage, dressed the operatic finery of the cathedral's choicest robes, with cope and mitre to match.

We, the audience are already being confused by the author, for we have now to engage the cryptic equation of power; and we (well maybe more so the first audience) are of course all very familiar with the power of Church law.

Next, on stage is "King Jeroboam of Israel"; and his presence is so powerful that he does not even need a speaking part; he is there, and all power is given over to him. In recent times some 'modern' directors have chosen to place this play in a more contemporary setting, and the part of the king has been undertaken by a 'man' in an Armani suit with either a red tie or a blue tie, but that doesn't seem to provide the same contrast as in the original setting.

Finally, just before the final speech that closes the play, the truth of the initial character is revealed;

"I am no prophet, nor a prophet's son; but I am a herdsman, and a dresser of sycamore trees";

and once again our minds are stirred into confusion as we try and reconcile where the power resides in this dynamic interplay.

So as we leave the theatre we explore our confusion, and at the same time we seek to see if others got the insights that the play has sparked in us.

In today's world we are most familiar with the 'prophetic voice' when we hear it from the stars and superstars that the media brings on to the stage; and we can all recognise that voice when we hear it.

Some examples we might all be familiar with:

Nelson Mandela: Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.

Barack Obama: Change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time. We are the ones we've been waiting for. We are the change that we seek.

Angela Merkel: Wherever it is possible, we must lower the entry hurdles for those who bring the country forward.

Mahatma Gandhi: You must be the change you wish to see in the world.

Mother Teresa: If you can't feed a hundred people, then feed just one.

And we can all list hundreds of other prophetic utterances that we have heard from the stars that appear on our television sets and social media mobile apps; and just as in the play of Amos, these 'stars' stand out on the stage of humanity.

How these words then interact with the dynamic of Church and State often creates a real sense of confusion; and often the voice of tradition, the voice of faith and the voice of law is heard to override the prophetic voice; again some examples from the church:

Saint Augustine, Bishop of Hippo Regius (354-430)

Woman does not possess the image of God in herself but only when taken together with the male who is her head, so that the whole substance is one image.

Pat Robertson, Southern Baptist leader (1930-): fundraising letter July 1992
The feminist agenda is not about equal rights for women. It is about a socialist, anti-family political movement that encourages women to leave their husbands, kill their children, practice witchcraft, destroy capitalism and become lesbians.

Cardinal George Pell

Abortion is a worse moral scandal than priests sexually abusing young people.

And, as we have no clear State leadership at present, maybe just one quote just to illustrate the clear difference when placed on stage with the prophetic voice:

Foreign Minister Julie Bishop has backed comments by her colleague **Peter Dutton** that "illiterate and innumerate" refugees would take Australian jobs or "languish" on the dole if Australia was to significantly increase its humanitarian intake.

In the play of Amos the prophetic star who walked on to the stage is revealed after the Church and the state have had their voice; *"I am no prophet, nor a prophet's son; but I am a herdsman, and a dresser of sycamore trees"*

The play is a powerful drama that illustrates our place in bringing about change in the world, and our place in the creation of tomorrow.

We are perhaps more familiar with the nativity drama of Christmas which again seeks to illustrate that the Divine word is birthed in the everyday lowliness of humanity.

Paul seeks to remind and affirm the reality of the divine in each and in all as he writes to the early Christians in Colossae:

For this reason, since the day we heard it, we have not ceased praying for you and asking that you may 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. 11 May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully 12 giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light.

It was not as Prophet, Church or State that Paul speaks rather he speaks as one who sought to follow the teachings and revelation of Christ, one among others, one part of the body that was brought to birth from the Easter tomb.

And as we, also members gathering in the name of St Paul's, consider how the play of Amos might be encouraging us to step out and speak our part in the play of humanity; we're given the story of a learned lawyer who seeks to follow the path we also seek.

The lawyer asks;

"what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

It is question that seeks to discover the fullness of life lived in the Divine; it is a question that wants to know what living in the image of God really demands of us.

Like each of us, the lawyer already knew the answer; and probably like many of us, he wanted "*to justify himself*", and so he sought to clarify some of the fine print; and so he asks another question;

"And who is my neighbour?"

In the play of Amos, it is not the prophetic star at the start of the play, for that star like the advent star is only a pointer to the plays unfolding; rather it is the simple humble person toiling in the everyday that births the reality of tomorrow, one who was taken "*from following the flock*".

Today we might seek to become more aware of the flock that we follow, the patterns and habits that shape our lives, and also become aware of our neighbour; not the person next door, nor the person who sits with us in church, rather the one who lies face down on the beach of despair, the one who dies in the darkness of today's violence. For the voices of Church and State speak of many things, but in each of us there is a voice that cries for our neighbour.. and our neighbour cries for us.