

"I am no prophet"

These are the words of Amos to the priest at Bethel. Bring a prophet is hard. Because being a prophet means speaking truth to ears that often don't want to hear God's TRUTH.

Today, we heard the story of Amos, who God sent to the land we know as Samaria. Picture Amos, a lowly shepherd and a dresser of sycamore trees, suddenly called by God to prophesy. Amos didn't come from a family of prophets. He did not have a pedigree or even much education. Imagine how he must have felt when God called him to challenge a KING!? His task was difficult, yet he stepped forward, and spoke his message out loud. It was not a message that the leaders of the affluent nation wanted to hear. And we see the priest at the temple in Bethel, rejecting his words, shouting at him to go back to where he came from. Sometimes people just don't want to hear the truth.

The Gospel today underscores that message.

John the Baptist, a fearless prophet, whose life was marked by boldness and integrity, discovered the cost of truth-telling. The short version of today's passage is that John had spoken to the king's wife about the illegitimacy of her marriage to King Herod, and she nursed a grudge against him. And when the opportunity presented itself, she asked for John's head on a platter. It's a dreadful story: a reminder of the cost of discipleship.

20<sup>th</sup> Century prophets Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Martin Luther King, Junior also faced violence for their prophetic voices and for railing against the status quo. And while I hope that none of us will meet with similar ends, it is our call as Christians to speak the truth.

Even when it's inconvenient. Even when people don't want to hear it.

There's a wonderful stanza in Mary Oliver's poem "SOMETIMES" that reads:

"Instructions For Living a Life:

Pay attention. Be astonished. Tell about it."

Her words call us to develop our prophetic voices. We, the baptized, are called to pay attention and to speak up when the status quo does not align with the teachings of Jesus.

Today I especially commend these words to you, Henry and Phoebe.

Henry and Phoebe have made the very grown-up decision to be baptized today.

In talking to them about the promises they will make today, I recognized their resolve and their commitment to following Jesus: Their willingness to pay attention and to speak up.

They understand the risks. They understand the need to speak truth and to strive for justice and peace. They understand that being Christian means to pay attention to the needs of others and to the needs of the world.

[I AM IMMENSELY PROUD OF BOTH OF you!]

Today's lessons from Amos and from Mark contain wonderful instructions for all of us who strive to follow Jesus. They remind us of the importance of speaking truth, but more importantly, they pose questions that will transform us if we ask answer them truthfully.

Here they are: THREE questions to take home with you this week:

Number One: How far are you from God's plumb line?

If you've wandered away from it,  
it's time to turn around and to return to it.

NUMBER TWO:

Has God nudged you to speak up for someone else? How did you respond?  
Did you shy away? It's time to return to the plumb line; time to draw closer to those who need support.

And finally, Do you live into your promise to respect the dignity of every human being?

Or forgotten that your adversaries are also "precious" in God's sight?

Then it's time to look for God's plumb line.

When we ask ourselves these questions, and listen intently for God's response – we will know where to go and how to get there.

"I am no prophet," we sputter.

But God calls us all to be prophets. To share the Good News of the Gospel.

To offer compassion and hope. To respect the dignity of every human being.

The question before each of us today is: Will you go? Will you obey?

And will you act – in Jesus Name? Amen.

Okay, let's go do some baptizing! x