

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church

Not Safe, But Good.

God disciplines God's people when they refuse to follow God's ways.

Scripture: Amos 1:1-2, 5:14-15, 21-24

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November 14, 2021

Opening Hymn: God Of Grace And Glory

Choruses: Love The Lord Your God, Everlasting God

Closing Hymn: God Whose Giving Knows No Ending

I would like you all to close your eyes.

Close your eyes and imagine God.

Close your eyes and imagine God is here in our midst.

PAUSE

So what are you seeing?

Do you see an old man in a rocking chair?

Or maybe a motherly character

Bustling about in a kitchen?

Do you imagine Jesus?

Jesus surrounded by children?

Jesus with a lamb over his shoulders?

Please open your eyes...

When I was a young boy,

I read through C.S. Lewis' Chronicles of Narnia.

The Chronicles of Narnia is an amazing fantasy series

of seven little novels

that has seen countless

adaptations for TV, radio, stage, and film.

Netflix is currently working on a live-action adaptation.

Narnia is about a group of siblings who gain access

To a "fantasy world of magic,

mythical beasts and talking animals"ⁱ

The ruler of that world parallel world is a called Aslan.

When "Mr. Beaver tells [one of these children] that Aslan...

is a great lion.

[she] is surprised,

since she assumed Aslan was a man.

She then tells Mr. Beaver,

"I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion."

She asks Mr. Beaver if Aslan is safe,
 to which Mr. Beaver replies,
 "Safe? Who said anything about safe?

'Course he isn't safe.
 But he's good.
 He's the King."ⁱⁱ

Now if you ever read the series you'll start recognising
 That the plot is somehow quite familiar.

The Chronicles of Narnia has lots of connections the Gospel.
 Aslan can be understood as a cypher
 for Jesus our Savior and King.

So why did Lewis choose to depict God and Jesus as a Lion?
 As Mr. Beaver mentioned,
 Lions are not exactly safe...

PAUSE

In today's lesson we encounter the prophet, Amos.
 Amos is a Judean shepherd who is sent by God
 To speak against the northern tribes of Israel.

Amos is an unconventional prophet.
 And God's complaint against the people
 is not what most of us would imagine.

It's not that the people are too busy to gather on Sundays.
 (The complaint the most ministers have
 Of their congregations.)

In fact, these people are quite pious.
 They worship frequently
 And tithe regularly.

But while they make honor God each Sunday,
 God has this serious problem with them:
 They forget about God during the week.

Listen to God's complaint:

"Because of the three great sins of Israel
 —make that four—I'm not putting up with them any longer.
 They buy and sell upstanding people.
 People for them are only things—ways of making money.
 They'd sell a poor man for a pair of shoes.
 They'd sell their own grandmother!
 They grind the penniless into the dirt,
 shove the luckless into the ditch."ⁱⁱⁱ

God's complaint is that while they 'honor' God at church
They dishonor people during the week.

Think back to earlier this fall
When we were reminded
how God rescued the people from Egypt.

God sent plagues against Pharaoh because he would not
Release them from their bondage
And let God's people go.

But now this people who have been redeemed from oppression
Are busy exploiting one another.

Instead of worship generating justice and righteousness
it provides a shiny veneer,
a coverup for the misdeeds of the week.

So just as God sent Moses to warn Pharaoh,
Now God sends Amos to warn the people.

Using that imagery adopted by Lewis
We are told that God 'roars' from Zion
and 'thunders' from Jerusalem.

God declares: "I hate, I despise your religious festivals"^{iv}

And God sends Amos to warn them that
judgment is on the way.

In the verses leading up to the last section Christine read,
Amos announces:

"Woe to all of you who want God's Judgment Day!
Why would you want to see God, want him to come?
When God comes, it will be bad news before it's good news,
the worst of times, not the best of times.
Here's what it's like: A man runs from a lion
right into the jaws of a bear."^v

Once again we see this 'unexpected' imagery adopted by Lewis:
God is a ferocious lion,
God is a rampaging bear.

History tells us that despite this graphic warning
the people didn't respond to Amos'
call to repentance.

"After King Jeroboam, the government deteriorated.
Five kings took the throne in the next 13 years;
four were assassinated.

In 30 years Israel was permanently dismantled by Assyrian armies.^{vi}

God did not tolerate the indifference people had
To those who were suffering in their midst.

But if God couldn't tolerate the behavior of God's people then,
how what about us now?

Would God be pleased with our worship services,
When God knows how self-serving we live
The rest of the week?

Will it be enough for God
That we managed to keep our hands clean
Even while we enjoyed the proceeds of injustice?

Will it be enough for God that we lived
Too far away from the poor
To hear their cries for help?

PAUSE

Last night I was watching some tv with my family.
It was a show about tiny houses.

The tiny-house movement...
is an architectural and social movement
that advocates for downsizing living spaces,
simplifying, and essentially "living with less."

[Less means a maximum of 400 ft² excluding lofts.]^{vii}

On the show we were watching,
the couple who were building their tiny house
Were doing so,

to showcase an environmentally sensitive lifestyle
That they had adopted.

So why am I bringing this up?

When people start talking about economic justice,
Most people's eyes glaze over.
We have bought into the idea
That there is nothing to do
But simply go with the flow.

For me, the tiny house movement
Is a clear demonstration that we can live differently.

If there are people who can make a transition
To living in 400 ft²

then surely we as God's people can adjust
Our own lifestyles to ensure that our living

has a gentler impact on the environment
And brings more justice
and less harm into the world.

How is this done
Especially when we are often physically removed
From our investment impacts or our consumer choices?

Living more justly means being more selective than simply
Buying shares in those companies
that promise the greatest returns.

It means considering the good
these companies are bringing into the world
And how they treat their employees
And the environment.

Living more justly means being more selective than simply
Buying the cheapest product on the shelves.
It means buying products that
Give fair returns to labourers.

It means shopping at locations
that have a reputation for just practices.

Does this promise to make your lives easier? No.
The couple who built a tiny home
Spent countless hours poring over its design
So that the space would be practical and efficient.

Living justly has a cost.
But so does ignoring the pleas of those who are suffering.

Maybe at the beginning of my sermon you imagined a smiling Jesus
Standing before you.
Maybe you're convinced
That Jesus is more generous and forgiving

And that 'justice' is just a fabrication
Of people who'd rather not work...

Well consider these words of Jesus
Words for a religious people
Who failed to listen to God's call:

"Then [the King] will say to those on his left,
'Depart from me, you who are cursed,
into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat,
 I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink,
 I was a stranger and you did not invite me in,
 I needed clothes and you did not clothe me,
 I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.'

"They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry
 or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison,
 and did not help you?'

"He will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do
 for one of the least of these,
 you did not do for me.'"^{viii}

Now let me be clear.
 God is interested in our reform not our destruction.
 These stories are meant to shake us out of our slumber.

But God will not shrug off our ongoing disobedience.
 God is not safe,
 even if God is good.

ⁱ Contributors to Wikimedia projects. "The Chronicles of Narnia - Wikipedia." 11 Nov. 2021, en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=The_Chronicles_of_Narnia&oldid=1054724641.

ⁱⁱ C.S. Lewis *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*

ⁱⁱⁱ Amos 2:6-7 MSG

^{iv} Amos 5:21 NIV

^v Amos 5:18-19

^{vi} "The Student Bible" with notes by Philip Yancey and Tim Stafford 792, 793

^{vii} Contributors to Wikimedia projects. "Tiny-house movement - Wikipedia." 9 Oct. 2021, en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Tiny-house_movement&oldid=1049099609.

^{viii} Matthew 25:41-46 NIV