

Those who were on the Pastor Nominating Committee may recall that Amos was part of what I preached at Trinity Church Tucson 3 years ago, it is one of my favorites. According to The Prophet Amos, GOD is disgusted, fed up with what we have done to Creation and to one another.

God promised never again to destroy by FLOOD, so instead, the Prophet finds GOD at the bottom of the Ocean creating an unquenchable Fire to cauterize and consume all Creation. And the Prophet cries out "No LORD" and GOD Repents. Then the Prophet finds God creating a Plague to destroy all vegetation with LOCUSTS to make Humanity suffer, the Prophet begs "No LORD" and again GOD repents. BUT in both, Humanity did not repent! So GOD provides a 3rd Vision, telling the Prophet to go to the Temple at Jerusalem to verify how much Out of True even the Temple has become, against the Plumbline from God.

There is a subtle power in this passage, that in the original Hebrew of the Jewish Scriptures the word used here for plumbline is ANAK. Except, Hebrew never had the word Plumbline! ANAK means Plumbline in the Syro-Phoenician language, which was known to the Jewish people, much as we know the word Sushi from Japanese, Façade from French, or Gesundheit from German. However, Hebrew did have the word ANAH which looks exactly like ANAK, except that the final consonant becomes dotted as we would dot an I, changing the letter from a soft H to a hard K. Writing on parchment with a quill or stick, the extra dotting of a letter would be easy to do. However, the Hebrew word ANAH does not mean Plumbline, instead ANAH refers to A SIGH.

One of our flock worshipping on Live Stream responded the other day, that it seemed as though Pastor Diane and I had each been emphasizing forgiveness and tolerance in an horrific world of chaos. Don't you ever want to get Really Angry? Doesn't GOD get angry? My brothers who did not go into the ministry, often refer to the God of the Old Testament as a God of WRATH and the New Testament as a God of LOVE; but it is not as simple as that, both because we affirm believing in ONE GOD, but also because I find 4 occasions in the Old Testament and 2 in the Gospels where God truly becomes angry.

Even when Cain murdered his brother Abel, God did not destroy the murderer, God marked Cain that all would know him, but there continues a lineage of the descendants of Cain.

In the Book of Genesis, God destroyed all the world with a Flood, then started over with Noah's family. In the Book of Exodus, when Pharaoh had oppressed the people, demanding to be treated as a GOD, GOD opened the Red Sea for Moses and the Israelites to escape into the Wilderness, then GOD closed the waters upon Pharaoh destroying him and his chariots and horses and armies, but Egypt continued.

As a metaphor for God's struggle with Israel, God has the Prophet Hosea marry a prostitute who cannot be faithful to her covenant of love. After living together and having children, Hosea like GOD resolves to send his wife Gomer away, where she will be safe, but no longer with him. And yet having EXILED the ones they love, Hosea and GOD each redeem the ones who had hurt them, not because of the contrition of the other, not because they repented/they did not; but because GOD and Hosea could not live without LOVE. When Jesus entered the Temple finding Money Changers and Sellers of Merchandise even there, he overturned their tables and drove them out with a whip.

In the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, when the Empire crucifies our Savior, GOD's own Son, the Bible describes the Sky turned black, the earth shook, and the Curtain separating the Holy of Holies from the people was ripped in two. Blotting out the light of the Sun, making the land chaotic, sounds like a reversal of Creation in Genesis! Tearing the Curtain is not simply ripping fabric, which was a symbol for anguish, but represents God unleashing the barrier between what is set apart as Holy and what is profane.

And yet, in each of these examples of GOD's Anger, God preserved a Remnant. After Pharaoh's armies were destroyed Egypt went on with Israel in the wilderness, Hosea reclaimed his wife and their children/after 70 years in Babylon Israel was permitted to return, and 3 days after the Crucifixion there was Easter. That is the Power of the SIGH...

Yes, the Temple, all that is Holy, and all the World is Out of Plumb, no longer True, and those attacking Ukraine, those desecrating our Nation's Capitol during one of America's most sacred acts, those murdering children in schools, and those murdering people at a parade, ...those people probably are not going to repent.

As believers, we cannot accept what they have done, we have to seek accountability, but we also have to shake the dust off our shoes, knowing that our trying to love them, our offering peace is not LOST, that peace returns to God. AND AT TIMES all we can do, what I firmly believe God does: is to SIGH, or maybe Scream.

Examples of this are not only on a mass or global scale... Jesus visited the home of those who would be his close friends Lazarus, Martha and Mary. Exactly like us, when entertaining Martha was running about with so many things needing to be done, and cursing under her breath that her sister Mary was not helping her. Listening to this, Jesus must have SIGHED, as he said "Martha, Martha, you are distracted by many things. Mary has chosen the good portion and it will not be taken from her."

Do you remember the movie City Slickers from 20 years ago. Three life-long friends from the city approaching changes in life, go on a Cattle Drive, and along the way, Billy Crystal's character is told by crusty old Cowboy Jack Palance "You are distracted and complaining about so many different things. You work all year long putting knots in your rope, and you come out here for two weeks, working that much harder, to try to get the knots out. All that is important is One Thing, but for each of us you have discovered what that One thing is."

The difficulty is that we cannot make a scapegoat out of Martha. If we do, the Martha's of this world may abandon service all together! And if we commend Mary to profusely, she may never get up off her butt. There is a time to listen, to pray and reflect, and there is a time to go and act.

My friend Tom Long described having served on an Advisory Group supporting College Chaplains. One year, as these Pastors were listening to the Chaplains' Reports, the question was asked: "What are College Students like morally these days?" The Chaplains looked at one another for what to say, when finally one said: "Well, I think you would be basically pleased. As students they are ambitiously working at their careers, but that is not all that they are. A lot of them tutor kids after school. Some work at a Shelter, others at a Soup Kitchen. Last week a group of students were protesting the War overseas." As she talked, the Jewish Rabbi was listening and began to smile. The more she spoke, the bigger he grinned, until his humor became distracting. "Did I say something funny?" she said. "No, No" he replied "I am just sitting here thinking. You are stating that your students are good people, and you are right. And you are saying that they are involved in good causes, and you are right. But what I was thinking was that the One Thing they were lacking is a vision of salvation." All the others looked at him, and he said "No, it's true, if you do not have some vision of what God is doing to repair the whole creation, you cannot continue to get up every day and work in a soup kitchen, to Cook and Wash Dishes. Life beats you down."

Mary sat at Jesus' feet, listening to his Word, listening to HIS VISION, and WITHOUT that Vision, like Martha preparing meals of hospitality for the world, it will finally wear you down, worry us, distract us,

anger and exhaust us into a rage.

WITH that WORD, however, we can live in the love of Christ, feeding the hungry, caring for the sick, showing hospitality to the stranger.

What did Mary hear at the feet of Jesus? What is the Word we need to hear of salvation from God?

Blessed are you who are poor for yours is the kingdom of God.

Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled.

Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.

Peace be with you. Do not be afraid.

What we hear is that our lives are gathered in God's life,
we are one with all creation and with GOD.

Therefore, WHAT WE DO for others COUNTS, really Counts. We are NOT Alone, passive and helpless. We can trust God and hope for God's New Creation.

And until it comes, we can listen for God's SIGH, knowing GOD cares and wants to redeem us, when we are ready to sit and listen. When we are prepared for redemption.