

My Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Just about all the prophets of the Old Testament, with the exception of Isaiah, were reluctant prophets, none more so than Amos. He was content to be a farmer from Takoa in the Southern Kingdom of Judah, when God broke in on his life and set him on fire to denounce injustice rampant throughout the land. So Amos goes to Bethel in the Northern Kingdom of Israel where there is a royal temple.

Amos was not concerned with making friends and influencing people. He did not attempt to endear himself to the king or the people. His message stands as one of the most powerful voices ever to challenge hypocrisy and injustice. He boldly indicts kings, priests, and leaders. He accused the powerful of placing less value on the poor than on sandals and compared wealthy women to pampered cows.

Is it any wonder that we hear Amaziah, the priest, on behalf of the king and the powerful, to get out of town? Isn't it interesting that when he tells Amos he has to leave Bethel "for it is the king's sanctuary and a royal temple"? There is no mention of it being God's sanctuary or God's temple. And that, of course, is the point, the people, in abandoning the God of their salvation and settling for their own comfort, greed, and avarice, and security at the expense of the poor, had doomed themselves. God would allow them to destroy themselves was Amos' powerful message.

The Scriptures nor history tell us what became of Amos. Did he leave? Did they kill him, as they did prophets before him? Or did he return happily to his fields and his flock?

It really doesn't matter. What matters is his message which resonates from that time to ours. In abandoning the God of our salvation in favor of our own comfort, greed, and avarice, and security, with little regard for the poor, are we sowing the seeds of our own destruction as a people? Is God, in fact, allowing us to destroy ourselves?

Like Amos, the Twelve are content in their lives, following Jesus. Though they had recently witnessed the momentary, and kind of humiliating set-back in Nazareth, where Jesus' own family and townspeople rejected him, they were ready to get back on the road. They loved hearing Jesus teach and reveled in his mighty works and enjoyed basking in the glow of his prominence and popularity. But the Lord had other plans for them. He was sending them out on their own, two by two. Further, he told them to take nothing with them, basically saying, don't plan for the journey. Take what you have—the clothes on your back, the sandals on your feet, and a walking stick—nothing more. The only thing he gave them was "authority over unclean spirits".

In its own way, that's kind of strange, don't you think? On this first missionary journey that Jesus is sending his Apostles, he doesn't tell them to proclaim the Kingdom of God; neither does he tell them to prepare the people for his coming. No, according to St. Mark, he simply "gave them authority over unclean spirits."

Now, Mark uses this phrase of "unclean spirits" more than any other Sacred Writer of the Scriptures. My research suggests that it kind of a catch-all phrase. It seems to mean any thing that is not of God—an attitude or an illness or a behavior or a frame of mind—in short, a sickly or sinful condition. These are what Jesus gave the Apostles authority over.

He also didn't give them any instruction. They didn't have any catechism to follow, or manual of how to exercise that authority. He sent them out with only the clothes on their back, the sandals on their feet, and a walking stick.

I believe the Lord sent them that way so that they had nothing to depend on but what they had experienced with him. "So, they went off, "St. Mark tells us, "and preached repentance". The authority with which they preached was the fire of love in their hearts for Jesus. The repentance that they preached was the "metanoia" or necessity to change message that invites people to believe in God's alternative to the reality they see around them. It was that message that chased away the demons and their conviction that nothing can change. The healings the Apostles performed, like those Jesus worked, were signs of that different reality—signs of what the kingdom of God is like and proof that it is possible.

The stories of Amos and the Twelve whom Jesus sent out are stories of people who were captivated by God's imaginative love. They were people who allowed themselves to be chosen and changed into more than they ever thought they could be. For that to happen, they had to be willing to leave their sycamores and sheep and seashore. They had to allow their hearts to be vulnerable to the touch of God who offers endless possibilities.

Our Second Reading today from Ephesians connects the stories of the calls and responses of Amos and the Twelve to God's invitation is one long prayer of thanking God for having chosen us to participate in Christ's life and mission, "from before the foundation of the world".

My Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Remember a couple of weeks ago when we baptized beautiful, little Ben-ya-mean Romero-Duenas. I anointed and blessed him with chrism on the crown of his head, making him a prince in the Kingdom of God. In that anointing and blessing, he also received his call into the priesthood, the prophecy, and the kingship of Christ. In and through and with Christ he has been chosen to offer his life in service to God and his people; he has been chosen to heal the ills of our society and the people he encounters in his life by challenging them to embrace God's path to truth and justice; and he was given authority over the evil and ills

he encounters on his life's journey. On the occasion of our baptism, we too were anointed and blessed to carry out this work of Christ, and were ratified in that anointing and blessing in the Sacrament of Confirmation.

Whether you recognize it or not, with the reluctance of Amos or the exuberance of the Twelve, that is what you are here for this morning—to thank God for having chosen you to participate in Christ's love and mission, “from before the foundation of the world.” God knit you in your Mother's womb. You are wonderfully and marvelously made, for one purpose, for one purpose only—to participate in Christ's life and mission.

With Amos, we are to stand up to hypocrisy and injustice and denounce the powerful who trample on the needs and rights of the poor. With the Twelve we are to assert authority over “unclean spirits”, not depending on any thing outside ourselves, but only on the fire of God's love within us. Participating in the life of Christ, for which we give thanks to God today, his mission to change all that is evil in the world has become our mission.

Through their trust in Jesus, the Apostles were able to drive out demons and cure the sick. And while Amos' call to “let justice surge like waters, and righteousness like an unfailing stream” was ignored by ancient Israel, it was heard thousands of years later when Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. quoted it in his “I Have a Dream” speech.

Like Amos, we're called to denounce injustice, even when it's unpopular. Like the Apostles, we're called to offer healing to others, even if we may be rejected. So, we pray with Paul today, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavens, as he chose us in him, before the foundation of the world, to be holy and without blemish before him. Let the Church say, AMEN!