

# EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Cross of Glory Evangelical Lutheran Church

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## From the Flock to the Front Page

### Amos 7:10-15

Then Amaziah the priest of Bethel sent a message to Jeroboam king of Israel: "Amos is raising a conspiracy against you in the very heart of Israel. The land cannot bear all his words. For this is what Amos is saying: "Jeroboam will die by the sword, and Israel will surely go into exile, away from their native land." Then Amaziah said to Amos, "Get out, you seer! Go back to the land of Judah. Earn your bread there and do your prophesying there. Don't prophesy anymore at Bethel, because this is the king's sanctuary and the temple of the kingdom." Amos answered Amaziah, "I was neither a prophet nor a prophet's son, but I was a shepherd, and I also took care of sycamore-fig trees. But the LORD took me from tending the flock and said to me, 'Go, prophesy to my people Israel.

Everybody loves to cheer for an underdog. When there is a contest between a powerhouse and a virtual unknown, most casual viewers will pull for the unknown. Why is it that people are so fascinated with underdogs and upset victories? I think it is because they like to identify with them. People like to think: "If this no-name can go on to accomplish such an amazing feat, maybe I can too." In our text this morning, we are able to see one of the greatest underdogs in the entire Bible: the prophet Amos. We see Amos making pretty big headlines in the kingdom of Israel. But he wasn't always such a big name. In fact, Amos began his career as no more than a shepherd and a fig tree caretaker. So how was Amos able to go *from the flock to the front page*? In answering that question, we will also find out how God can use us to do extraordinary things.

Amos was born in the small town of Tekoa, just a few miles from the city of Bethlehem. This meant that Amos lived in the southern kingdom of Judah. He earned his living tending sheep and caring for sycamore fig trees. The trees needed to be cut in a special way so that the insect inside could escape and the figs would be edible. It wasn't necessarily the noblest profession. All these things changed, however, when God called Amos to be his prophet among the people of the northern kingdom of Israel.

It was a very prosperous time in the northern kingdom. There was lavish wealth and relative peace in the nation. It was also a very wicked time in the kingdom. The decadent lifestyles of the wealthy trampled on the poor and needy in the society. There was great social injustice and also a lack of any true spirituality. The people went through the motions of their religion, but their hearts were far from the LORD. For this reason, the message that Amos was to bring to these people was one of judgment. He told them that their rebellion would cause the downfall of their nation and the hand of the LORD would be raised against their king.

Understandably, this made Amos a very unpopular figure. So unpopular that a priest named Amaziah wanted him to get out of the country. He felt that Amos was stirring up a conspiracy against the king. Amaziah should have known better. He was a priest of the LORD. But

apparently he was just as steeped in wickedness as the rest of the people and he didn't like to hear the truth about the sins of the kingdom any more than the other rebellious members of that kingdom. So he told Amos, in no uncertain terms, "Get out!"

And now listen to Amos' reply again, "*I was neither a prophet nor a prophet's son, but I was a shepherd, and I also took care of sycamore-fig trees. But the LORD took me from tending the flock and said to me, 'Go, prophesy to my people Israel.'*" Amos told Amaziah, "Look, if it were up to me, I'd be back in Judah tending my sheep. But the LORD chose me and told me to speak the truth here and that is what I will do." We are not told of any reaction that Amaziah had to Amos' words. But perhaps that is exactly the reaction he did have: stunned silence. What could he say in reply to the simple truth that Amos was there because that is where the LORD chose him to be?

Have you ever faced any Amaziah's in your own life? Have you had someone question your worth as a prophet of the LORD? Understand that a prophet is someone who speaks God's Word. In that sense, we are all prophets. And yet there are those who would like us to get out of town just like Amaziah wanted Amos to leave Israel. They might say to us, "I know who you are. You have no business talking about being a Christian. I've seen the way you lose your temper." or "I've heard you spreading gossip. Now you are going to try to tell me about what God says? Get out of town."

Perhaps the worst Amaziah you have encountered is yourself. It can sometimes be easy for us to question our own worthiness to speak God's Word. After all, we know ourselves better than anyone else. And we know our sinfulness better than anyone else. We end up asking ourselves, "How can I consider myself a Christian when I have fallen into that same sin again? What business do I have telling others about Christianity when my life is so far from perfection?" Or instead of our worthiness we question our abilities. "I'm not a pastor or a teacher. I don't know enough about the Bible to tell others about it. I'm not good at evangelism. Let somebody who really has a gift in that area spread the gospel."

When we think thoughts such as these, we are forgetting one thing—one very important thing. Our worthiness or ability to speak God's Word does not come from ourselves, it comes from the Lord. We can shoot down any accusations with the same Words as Amos: "I have been chosen by the LORD." The fact that we have been chosen is brought out beautifully in our second lesson today from the book of Ephesians. Paul writes that God chose us in Christ before the creation of the world. Even before God said, "Let there be light," he was thinking of you. He was thinking of his plan to redeem your soul through the blood of Jesus. He was thinking of the way in which he would work faith in your heart through the Word. He was thinking of how he would give you his Spirit as a seal guaranteeing your eternal life in heaven. This is the wonderful truth of the gospel. When others question your worthiness or those thoughts creep into your own mind, you can respond by saying, "I have been chosen by God, redeemed by Christ and sealed by the Spirit. The worth that I have comes from the worthiness of God's own Son. Through him, I can accomplish great things." And God does have many great things in store for you to do.

The prophet Amos probably never thought in his wildest dreams while he was tending sheep that he would one day be God's chosen spokesperson to the people of Israel. Yet that is exactly what he did. And he was not shy about it. He knew the word he was speaking was God's Word and he knew he had been chosen for this very task. So he boldly proclaimed the destruction of Israel and the fall of the house of Jeroboam, the king. This kind of preaching made front-page headlines in Israel. Unfortunately, it was mostly negative press. However, there were some who heard Amos' message and repented of their sin. For those who still clung to the LORD and placed their hope in the coming Messiah, Amos had a different message. He spoke of a coming restoration of the people of Israel—a day when the exiles would return and rebuild their fallen kingdom. This restoration would ultimately point towards the complete restoration of all mankind that would take place on the cross of Calvary.

Like Amos, you have been chosen for an extraordinary mission. You, also, have been entrusted with a message of repentance and restoration through Jesus. Your story can be one of the greatest underdog stories of all time. Maybe you think you are not the type of person who can make front-page headlines. But as you carry out the Great Commission of going and making disciples of all nations, you end up on the front page day after day...in heaven. "John Smith tells his neighbor about Jesus." And the angels cheer. "Mary Smith teaches children about their Savior in Sunday School." And the angels cheer. "Jane Miller speaks words of forgiveness to her husband." And the angels cheer.

What a great privilege and honor it is to be involved in the mission of the church. And how are you equal to such a task? How can God take you from the flock to the front page? It's not that you are such a good person or such an eloquent speaker. No, it's because you were chosen by God, redeemed by Jesus Christ and sealed by the Holy Spirit. You don't have to look to yourself for your worth or your ability to carry out God's will. You need only to look at Jesus. Through Christ, you can do extraordinary things.

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