

[Spirituality](#)
[Scripture for Life](#)



by Mary M. McGlone

[View Author Profile](#)

[Join the Conversation](#)

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. [Learn more](#)

July 15, 2018

[Share on Facebook](#)[Share on Twitter](#)[Email to a friend](#)[Print](#)

Our liturgy of the word begins with the Prophet Amos. As the priest in charge is evicting him from the kingdom for being a prophet of doom, Amos protests that he never had any intention of becoming a prophet. Make his living on soothsaying? Hardly! He was more than content to mind his own flocks and orchards far from any idea of speaking out against injustice or calling for his people's conversion.

That was before God broke in on his life and set him on fire to denounce the injustice rampant in the land. Once on a roll, Amos preached with the best of them, accusing the powerful of placing less value on the poor than on sandals and comparing wealthy women to pampered cows. (Think of how the priest's wife must have reacted!) It is little surprise that the temple elite wanted to be rid of him.

Amos is just one of many prophets who must have looked to God and asked "Why me?" But even if he couldn't answer the question, he was still on fire with God's passion.

We don't necessarily think of Jesus' apostles as having that sort of fire — at least not during Jesus' lifetime. But a close look at today's Gospel might change our minds. The group had just been with Jesus as he was rejected in Nazareth and they stuck with him as he continued to preach in other places. Then, while they were on the road, he called them together to make them his emissaries.

He didn't ordain them, hand them a catechism or even give them a supply of newsprint and markers. He did give them power over evil spirits. What kind of comfort was that? Perhaps it was an insurance policy, but if so, one of the clauses clearly indicated that they were going to be fighting the devil and his minions!

The twelve went out with nothing more than a companion, the clothes on their backs and the fire in their hearts. Mark tells us that they preached "repentance," that's the metanoia message that invites people to believe in God's alternative to the reality they see around them. It's the message that had caught them in Jesus' net in the first place and the only thing they had to offer the people they were going out to meet. 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 — Jeremiah would say seduced. 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, sheep and seashore. They had to allow their hearts to be vulnerable to the touch of God who offers endless possibilities.

The message of this week's readings follows last week's invitation to accept the scandal of the Incarnation. Today's selection from the Letter to the Ephesians is one long prayer of thanks to God for having chosen us to participate in Christ's life and the hope he brings. That fits between the stories of Amos and the apostles as a reminder that we share their call. The hardest mystery to believe may be, as Paul says, that God "chose us in Christ to be holy."

On this Sunday, as we listen to these readings we can let them simply be another instance of hearing, "The Word of the Lord," and responding with our rote, "Thanks be to God." On the other hand, we could take some real Sabbath time to consider the experiences they are telling us about.

Beginning with Paul's reminder that we have been chosen since "before the foundation of the world," we might consider what it means to be blessed in Christ. Ask yourself, "How different would my life be if I didn't know about or believe in Christ?" Ask too, "When have I gotten caught in the net of Christ and the vision he offers?"

Finally, following the lead of Psalm 85, invite God to speak to the hearts of your faith community and the entire church by praying, "Lord, let us see your kindness, and grant us your salvation." This is the sort of prayer Jesus promised that two or three would never pray in vain. It may well be the sort of prayer that changed Amos from farmer to prophet and sent the apostles out to share their fire with anyone who would listen.

AMOS 7:12-15

Our first reading opens as Amaziah the priest lets Amos know he is fed up with him and his prophetic message. Just previous to today's selection, Amos had shared a number of troubling visions in which God warned that the people were about to be punished and the king would fall as a victim of the sword. Hearing that, Amaziah the priest ran off to the king to report on Amos' "trouble-making." He then went straight to Amos to inform him it was time to make himself scarce.

When Amaziah tells Amos to go back to where he came from, the command was probably both an insult and a warning, but as often happens with bullies, the priest could have claimed it was simply a strong suggestion. The priest tells the prophet to go back home where he can make a living prophesying among his own — it's sort of a "Take your bad news to your own people" message. According to Amaziah, Amos has no business in his territory because it belongs to the king and his temple. (So much for the God of Israel!)

Anyone who knows much about prophets' job descriptions would hear this and ask, "Isn't the prophet generally sent to the very center of power? Isn't the prophet's job to speak out to precisely those who think they need listen to no one but themselves?" Thus, Amaziah's rejection of Amos and his warning that he'd better get while the getting is good is a strong affirmation that Amos is doing precisely what he is called to do as a prophet. A prophetic message is always a threat to a religious regime which maintains close, self-promoting ties to the powers that be. Amaziah's consternation indicated that the status-quo, power and security had become the priesthood's primary values rather than faithfulness to God. Amaziah was happy with the power structure just as it was and used his authority to convince others that such was God's will. As Scripture scholar Roy Honeycutt points out in *Amos and His Message*, "The priests erred ... in assuming that God had already completely revealed his will. ... Any generation which feels that it has a complete understanding of God would do well to read afresh the prophets."

In reply to the priest's command that he deport himself, Amos explains his vocation. Saying "I was no prophet," he repudiates any pretense to office or special status. And to bring it home with force he adds, "Nor have I belonged to a company of prophets." Ironically, his refusal to claim or cultivate a professional résumé becomes the best validation of Amos' prophetic vocation. He had no intention of being a prophet, he was content to tend his own flocks and fields — literally, his own ranch — but the Lord had other plans for him.

PSALMS 85:9-10, 11-12, 13-14

At first glance, this is a rather strange choice of psalms to respond to our reading from Amos. Amos has been ordered

deported because he spoke of God's plan to punish the people. Why would we respond by singing that the Lord proclaims peace for the people? Probably because our faith teaches that whether we are in times of destitution or prosperity, we still belong to God.

When we say, "I will hear what God proclaims ... for he proclaims peace," we are giving ourselves an interpretive lens through which to evaluate any and all circumstances in which we find ourselves. No matter what is taking place, God offers a creative, life-giving response. Our task is to seek God's will. Thus, we pray, "Let us see your kindness and grant us your salvation."

God's loving kindness is the primary characteristic of the covenant: No matter what we do, God is faithful. If we are truly seeking God's kindness and salvation, we will rejoice in the promise that truth and justice are in the offing — no matter how dimly we perceive them. Those are the qualities of life in God's realm, a promise full of comfort to the just and a mortal threat to those who thrive on evil.

If we desire to pray this psalm sincerely, we must be ready for God's answer. We must be open to God's peace which, as Pope Paul VI reminded us, is the fruit of justice. We must be ready to seek and accept the truth — the truth about our lives and relationships, the truth about our church and our nation — the truth that will show us where we avoid or create obstacles to kindness and justice and how we must change our ways. Ultimately, this psalm calls us to seek out the people who speak like Amos in our day and to listen to them so that we can recognize the salvation God is offering us and our world.

EPHESIANS 1:3-14

Most scholars concur that the Letter to the Ephesians was written by someone who followed Paul's theology and style but wrote after Paul's death. But, since we have no name for this author who claimed Paul's name at the beginning of the letter, we can call him Paul.

"Paul" addressed this letter to the holy ones in Ephesus, a Greek city of more than 150,000 inhabitants which predated Rome's empire and was famous as the home of the Temple of Artemis, the Greek goddess of the moon and twin sister of Apollo. The letter, although ostensibly addressed to a particular community, is more like an encyclical, a letter addressed to the church at large.

The blessing we hear today is one long sentence in the original Greek, quite a challenge for any interpreter or reader. The blessing begins with praise of God for the gift of Christ. It goes on to describe the relationship that binds the community together with God in Christ.

Paul's first assertion is that God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world, an idea that leads some to the conclusion that human beings have been predestined — some for salvation, others not. That teaching can be read into the statement, but so can God's universal salvific will, the understanding that from all eternity God's plan was to share divine life with all of creation.

The overarching theme of this blessing is thanksgiving for God's gifts to us in and through Christ. That was a very real concept and a vivid experience for the early Christian communities. They had lived in a society without any knowledge of Christ and then saw the difference their new faith brought. That insight is not as fresh for those of us who were born into traditionally Christian communities.

Meditation on this reading can refresh our own faith. We could begin by asking ourselves what would be different about our life if we did not know of Christ or participate in the Christian community. Then, following the outline of this blessing we can ask what spiritual blessings we have received, what it means to believe that we have been chosen by God, how important forgiveness of sin is to us, and how our ultimate hopes are colored by our faith in Christ. Reading this blessing phrase by phrase and applying it to our own individual and communal life offers us the opportunity to deepen our communion with God, with one another and with our ancestors in the faith.

MARK 6:7-13

It helps if we listen to today's Gospel in its context, remembering that last week's ended with the statement that Jesus

could work no mighty deeds among his own because of their lack of faith. That's what the disciples witnessed just before Jesus called them together to send them out to carry forth his mission. Given the context, his invitation to mission could have seemed a great set-up for frustration.

Then, to add to the difficulties, Jesus gave them a series of guidelines apparently designed to exaggerate their vulnerability. Disregarding what their mothers had surely told them from the time they were little, Jesus sent them off without any provisions except sandals, a staff and the clothes on their backs. Like Jesus who could work wonders for people who accepted his message, they were to rely on those who received them.

Although the disciples were told not to provide for themselves, Jesus did give them the power to serve others. For the first time in the Gospel, we see here that Jesus not only had authority over the demons, but that very power was something he could bestow on others.

Mark doesn't tell us much more about their mission — there was no script except to repeat what they had learned from being with Jesus. Accentuating the simplicity of their approach, Jesus told them to stay with the first people who received them rather than to move from place to place. Then, perhaps more realistically, he told them that if a place refused to welcome or listen to them, they should act as if it were a pagan country and shake its dust off them before returning to the Holy Land.

We are left to wonder what those disciples felt as they were sent off. Did they think they were prepared for the task? What were they going to tell others about the repentance/metanoia they were preaching? How had it changed their lives? Were they eager or fearful about entering into combat with the demons? They had seen that the demons knew and spoke out about who Jesus was, what would the evil spirits reveal about them if they perturbed them? Unconcerned about our curiosity, Mark only tells us that the twelve went off and preached repentance and drove out many demons.

Scripture scholar and Jesuit Fr. Silvano Fausti comments on the disciples' mission saying that they were sent without anything because when we have things, that is what we think we can give. When we have nothing in our hands or pack, we can only give what comes from inside us. Perhaps that's the symbolic import of Jesus' sharing of his power over the demons. All that the disciples had to give was what they had received from Jesus, qualities that can't be contained in a sack or carried on a belt.

Today's readings invite us to look at our own call as disciples. Most real prophets (Isaiah excepted) don't choose that profession but find themselves called or cajoled into it. As they put their vocation into practice, they discover that the call to serve others becomes their unique way of entering into communion with God and their own people. The calling draws more out of them than they ever believed they could accomplish. Are we ready to get caught up in that dynamic?

Planning: 15th Sunday in Ordinary Time

By: Lawrence Mick

This week's readings continue to focus our attention on the role of the prophet. Once again, they remind us that prophets are often rejected. In our first reading, Amaziah seeks to banish Amos from Bethel. In the Gospel, Jesus warns his disciples as he sends them out to preach that they may be rejected, too. He tells them to shake the dust from their feet but to go on preaching.

Last week, we considered the challenges of accepting the prophet and heeding his or her words. This week, we might focus on the challenge of being prophets ourselves. A prophet is simply one who speaks for God, who proclaims that truth, especially when that truth is being ignored or violated in society.

At our baptism, we were given a share in the mission of Christ as priest, prophet and king. In Numbers 11:29, Moses exclaims, "If only all the people of the Lord were prophets! If only the Lord would bestow his spirit on them!" We all received the Holy Spirit in baptism and are called to speak for God. What does it mean for us to be prophets?

As was the case with the prophets of the Hebrew Scriptures, it often means speaking out about injustices in society. Prophets spoke up for orphans and widows and immigrants. They chastised the rich for ignoring the needs of the poor. They challenged kings and religious leaders who were not doing the will of God.

There is still clearly a need for prophets in our own time. Do you have the courage to fulfill the mission entrusted to you? Preachers and planners are called to bring to the attention of the assembly the areas where we all need to repent and change their attitudes and behaviors. Doing so will bring resistance and rejection by some. Are we content to let God's word be muzzled by fear?

The challenge of prophecy goes far beyond worship, of course. Are we willing to speak up at work or at public meetings to oppose racism, Islamophobia, mistreatment of the poor, radical income inequality, unjust immigration laws, use of the death penalty, acceptance of abortion and euthanasia, etc., etc.? Do we write or email our elected representatives to urge laws that protect the needy and the environment? Do we speak up in family gatherings when unchristian attitudes are expressed? There are many channels to speak God's word and proclaim the truth, and it is so desperately needed in an age of fake news and constant disinformation.

Our attention to God's word in our daily lives must mesh with our efforts to proclaim God's message at the liturgy. We are not called to prophesy on a part-time basis. We must speak the truth at all times, as Paul reminds, whether convenient or inconvenient.

Prayers: 14th Sunday in Ordinary Time

By: Peg Ekerdt

Introduction

We are all created in the image and likeness of God and we are chosen by God to fulfill the purpose of the "One who accomplishes all things." We are sent as missionaries and prophets to preach the good news by the witness of our lives. The path will not always be straight, nor will the message always be heard or welcome. But the Lord promises that as we go forth into the world, his grace is sufficient to do the work of discipleship: to preach and to heal those we encounter.

Penitential Act

- Lord Jesus, you are the source of all justice and peace: Lord, have mercy.
- Christ Jesus, you are the source of all love: Christ, have mercy.
- Lord Jesus, you promise us that your grace is sufficient for the journey: Lord, have mercy.

Prayer of the Faithful

Presider Let us pray for the needs of this gathered community and for our world.

Minister For the church, for embrace of the vocation Christ has given each of us — to daily bear witness to the practices of forgiveness and compassion, we pray:

- For leaders entrusted with care of the common good — in government and business — in boardrooms and newsrooms — for faithfulness, for wisdom, for courage ... we pray,
- For ears to hear the Gospel command to simplify how we live; for grace to trust that we need nothing for life's journey but to allow God to fill our every need ... we pray,
- For those who serve as prophets in our midst; who remind us of what matters most, who challenge the priorities we have made our own ... we pray,
- For those who long for good health, in body, mind and spirit, for healing of human hearts — for courage and hope to face each day ... we pray,

- For all who live in the midst of threat and fear — in our cities, in our country and throughout the world ... we pray,

Presider Source of all grace, accompany us as we go about our daily lives. Make us mindful of your presence in all times and places. Give us courage so that, with our listening ears and compassionate hearts, we may enrich the world as we speak what is true and pursue what is just. Open our eyes, heal our hearts, transform our need with your grace. We ask this in the name of Jesus, your Son. Amen

Advertisement

This story appears in the **Cycle B Sunday Resources** feature series. [View the full series](#).