

April 1, 2020 Midweek Lenten Service

The Invocation: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The Confession: If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. But if we confess our sins, God, who is faithful and just, will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Let us then confess our sins to God our Father. Most merciful God, we confess that we are by nature sinful and unclean. We have sinned against You in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done and by what we have left undone. We have not loved You with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We justly deserve Your present and eternal punishment. For the sake of Your son Jesus Christ, have mercy on us. Forgive us, renew us, and lead us, so that we may delight in Your will and walk in Your ways to the glory of Your holy name. Amen.

The Absolution: In the mercy of almighty God, Jesus Christ was given to die for us, and for His sake, God forgives us all our sins. To those who believe in Jesus Christ, He gives the power to become the children of God and bestows on them the Holy Spirit. May the Lord, who has begun this good work in us, bring it to completion in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Old Testament Reading is written in the book of Amos, chapter 7, verses 1 to 9

Then Amaziah the priest of Bethel sent to Jeroboam king of Israel, saying, “Amos has conspired against you in the midst of the house of Israel. The land is not able to bear all his words. For thus Amos has said, “‘Jeroboam shall die by the sword, and Israel must go into exile away from his land.’” And Amaziah said to Amos, “O seer, go, flee away to the land of Judah, and eat bread there, and prophesy there, but never again prophesy at Bethel, for it is the king's sanctuary, and it is a temple of the kingdom.” Then Amos answered and said to Amaziah, “I was^[a] no prophet, nor a prophet's son, but I was a herdsman and a dresser of sycamore figs.¹⁵ But the LORD took me from following the flock, and the LORD said to me, ‘Go, prophesy to my people Israel.’¹⁶ Now therefore hear the word of the LORD. “You say, ‘Do not prophesy against Israel, and do not preach against the house of Isaac.’ Therefore thus says the LORD: “‘Your wife shall be a prostitute in the city, and your sons and your daughters shall fall by the sword, and your land shall be divided up with a measuring line; you yourself shall die in an unclean land, and Israel shall surely go into exile away from its land.’”

The Holy Gospel is according to St. Matthew, chapter 23, verses 29 to 39.

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets and decorate the monuments of the righteous, saying, ‘If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.’ Thus you witness against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers. You serpents, you brood of vipers, how are you to escape being sentenced to hell? Therefore I send you prophets and wise men and scribes, some of whom you will kill and crucify, and some you will flog in your synagogues and persecute from town to town, so that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah the son of Barachiah,^l whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar. Truly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation. “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! See, your house is left to you desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again, until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.’”

Apostles' Creed: I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth. And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day He rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From thence He will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen

The Sermon: Lion Alert!

One of my favorite things to see at the Zoo, any Zoo, is the lion. He is mighty, majestic, manly, and with a touch of mean. My Grandmother, however, is not a fan. She always likes to remind me of the time that she took me to the Zoo in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, when I was a kid. I don't remember this story, but she sure does. Apparently, when we were looking at the lion, he stared me down, and then ran and jumped right into the glass, trying to get me! She instantly took me away, and has had a dislike for lions ever since! Could you imagine if one ever got out? Talk about a Lion Alert! My Grandmother was glad he was in his cage that day.

And, you know what, she is not the only one who feels this way. Amaziah, the priest at Bethel, is building a career around keeping the Lion in his cage. Only this Lion's name is the LORD or in Hebrew, "Yahweh."

In Amos 1:2 the prophet announces, "**The LORD roars from Zion and utters His voice from Jerusalem!**" The last thing Amaziah wants to see is a "Lion Alert." For Amaziah, whatever the cost, whatever the compromise, this Lion must never, ever rumble in Israel's jungle. He must remain in His cage. Amaziah's policy means that anyone who rattles, shakes, and opens cages must get out immediately and be stopped.

However, enter one Amos, a Judean cattleman and fig picker from Tekoa. He doesn't get the memo, nor does he care. Talk about a future lion alert. Amos is going to let the Lion out of the cage. It is through Amos that this Lion is saying to Israel, "**For three sins of Israel and for four, I will not turn back My wrath.**" In Chapter three, the Lion roars, "**You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your sins.**" In five, He growls, "**Woe to you who long for the day of the LORD; it will be a day of darkness and not light.**" And in chapter six, He moans, "**Woe to you who are at ease in Zion who do not grieve over Joseph's ruin.**"

This is no "still, small voice!" This is no "gentle Jesus meek and mild." And this is no tame, purring little kitty cat. In Amos 3:8 the prophet announces, "**The lion has roared, who will not fear? The Lord GOD has spoken, who can but prophesy?**"

But Amaziah says to Amos in verse 12, "**Get out, you seer! Go back to the land of Judah. Earn your bread there and do your prophesying there.**" When interpreted, Amaziah is saying, "Amos, this temple isn't big enough for the two of us. Go back home and get out of here. I don't want to hear what you are saying. So get out of my face you fig pickin', low-wattage shepherd boy, prophet wannabe!"

This priest Amaziah is an expert in image building, marketing techniques, public relations, and salesmanship. In fact, in Amos 7:11, when Amaziah reports to his boss what Amos is preaching, Amaziah conveniently avoids the sticky issues of syncretistic worship, poverty, oppression, and social injustice. His king, Jeroboam ben Joash, will no doubt be pleased with Amaziah because at Bethel it seems this priest is running such a smooth religious operation. Things seem to be going well.

Sisters and brothers, do not be deceived! There are powerful forces in our lives, in the church, and in our world shouting to us, "Be an Amaziah clone! Be content with religious clichés and jargon instead of blazing, burning truth! Sit satisfied in church with the motto, 'Come weal, come woe, my status is quo'!"

We live in a culture that systematically domesticates, de-fangs, and de-claws the roaring Lion. In 2 Timothy 3 Paul states, "**But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days . . . people will have the form of godliness but deny its power.**"

But living in the power, Amos says, "**I was neither a prophet nor a professional prophet.**" What Amos means and says with that is, "I am not a religious professional, paid to make pious pronouncements on public platforms. I will not be bought, compromised, deterred, diluted, or delayed. I will not flinch in the face of sacrifice, negotiate at the table of the enemy, ponder at the pool of popularity, or meander in the maze of mediocrity. I won't give up, back up, or let up until I've preached up, prayed up, and stayed up."

And why should this shock us? Should it? Not at all. Moses confronts Pharaoh with the LORD's thunderous, "**Let my people go.**" Nathan courageously puts his ecclesiastical career on the line when he summons David with the words, "**You are the man.**" Elijah takes the heat from Ahab, who calls him "**the troubler in Israel.**" Jeremiah daringly rewrites God's word after king Jehoiakim sliced it, diced it, and burned it. And Daniel's dream of the night shatters Nebuchadnezzar's illusion of the day.

Joining this "goodly fellowship" of the politically incorrect is Israel's greatest radical. Why, he once had the courage to make a whip and then use it to cleanse His Father's house. Another time He looked the religious leaders of His day straight in the eye and said, "**Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs that look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of**

dead men's bones." Climactically, He stands before His high priest and confesses, **"In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven."**

But this Lion is also the Lamb, and His mighty power is made most perfect in weakness. Jesus allows soldiers to march Him along the Via Dolorosa while He shoulders His crossbar with blood dripping from His butchered back. Jesus lets His executioners to strip Him naked, shove Him to the ground, and pin Him to wood with their tools of torture. And Jesus absorbs the spit and the insults without asking His Father to dispense twelve legions of angels.

Societies don't execute Captain Kangaroo, Mr. Rogers, or Sponge Bob, but they do destroy people who shake their religious establishments to the very core. "There," they said on that Friday afternoon, "no need to call 911. There is no more Lion alert. He's crucified, dead, and buried!"

But, coming forth from the tomb, the Lion rumbles in His jungle! Revelation 5:5 states: **"See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, He has triumphed!"** There is nothing dead about our Jesus! His love is not syrupy, sentimental, or sappy. But His fierce love for you is driven by nails, marked with scars, and crowned with thorns.

Now what do you suppose Amaziah will say to Amos if the prophet finally gives up, gives in, and goes along, just to be a good ol' boy? What will this priest say if Amos becomes a "yes" man to Jeroboam ben Joash? Amaziah—and all those like him—will say, "Welcome to our religious country club, where our motto is 'Come weal or woe, the status must forever remain quo'!"

But what do you think Amos will say if Amaziah confesses, "Enough is enough. I will no longer sell my soul on the altar called compromise; it is time to let the Lion loose!" Amos will raise a hand, make the sign of the cross, and announce what you hear in the absolution of your sins: "I forgive you of all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen."

The Lord's Prayer: Let us pray the prayer Jesus has taught us to pray: Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

The Benediction: The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make His face shine on you and be gracious unto you. The Lord look on You with His favor and give you peace. Amen.

Closing Address: Thanks for joining us for our service today. We ask if you could like, share, and comment below to help this video pop up in the feeds of others. Forward it to a friend. Hopefully in this time of lock down, God's Word can be spread more now than ever! Help us with that task. Keep your eyes open for our next service that will be sent out on Saturday for Palm Sunday. It will focus on Amos and the Passion readings. We also ask if you could continue to help and support the work and ministry that is done at Emmaus. You can find more information about giving plus at our website, which is our online giving app, or you can send your support to the Church. We also value your prayers. Again, thanks for joining us for our virtual service, and we hope to see you in person again, soon. God's blessings on the rest of your week.