

September 29, 2019
Church of the Redeemer, Greenville, SC

Amos 6: 1a, 4-7

Psalms 146

1 Timothy 6:6-19

Luke 16:19-31

“At the gate”

The prophet Amos paints a picture of leaders of both the southern (Zion) and northern (Samaria) kingdoms denying that the powerful Assyrian army might destroy them, too. It won't happen here ... it couldn't happen to us ... we are God's chosen people ... God will keep us in comfort ... we are secure. Amos depicts this life of ease and comfort with the imagery of a decadent feast. The rich rulers even drink wine from vessels reserved for worship. Their corruption is one of a deep distortion of faith, that God will protect us while we ignore the laws of Moses. There is no empathy no love of neighbor; those feasting do so while the masses suffer. They eat without acknowledging the deep suffering around them; they are focused only on themselves and their fine repast. The “common people” cannot repay the debts they incurred during a recent drought, so slavery settles in as a permanent way of life. The rulers' inability to acknowledge those who suffer is worse than apathy; they do not even see the neighbors who serve them.

So it is with Lazarus, a poor, sick man dumped outside the gate of an unnamed rich man. It is significant that we know the name of a beggar and not the name of the man behind the gate holding feasts and wearing purple in comfort and ease. Purple was the most expensive color to create; purple fine linen shows us that the rich man is very wealthy. We know the name of the outcast Lazarus, know that he eats leftover crumbs and that dogs tend to his sores. We see Lazarus' suffering, occurring at the gate of the rich man's wealth. The egregious sin of the rich man is his lack of vision, of not reaching out with the riches that God has provided in order to build God's kingdom on earth, in this life. In focusing only on himself, the rich man squanders his wealth. He is spiritually starving while withholding physical sustenance for others.

It is in death when the man behind the gate finally sees Lazarus; even then, from Hades, he wants to be served. He shows no knowledge of Lazarus' name. Again, on a level worse than apathy, he is completely unaware of the one who suffered at his doorstep, someone not worthy of being remembered, or named; just a slave to serve him.

No, Abraham says, there is no need to continue to try to save your siblings. If they will not listen to Moses and to the prophets, will not take care of widows, orphans,

the poor, then they will not listen even if someone is raised from the dead and tells them to do justice, to show mercy.

Well, someone has been raised from the dead, and it is that world that we have inherited, that world in which we are the caretakers. Jesus the Christ *is* risen. We *have* heard the commandments to love the Lord our God and to love our neighbors as ourselves. We have been told that the poor will be with us always, and that our Lord broke bread with sinners who are just like us, and worse. In Christ we have the opportunity to repent, to turn again toward Jesus and to live in the way of love.

Love tries repeatedly to get us, Love's beloved people, to love one another, to take care of our poor, of widows, of the unserved and undeserving. Love – God – loves us so much that we have the opportunity to walk with God's risen son, Jesus. Walking the way of love means that our life has been renewed, made new, in Jesus through the waters of baptism. Our new life happens when we repent and say, "I'm sorry, God. I'll do better."

Our Christian life comes with a deep responsibility to be generous with hope and of abundance. Oh, how the world needs our hope! We have enough, and more; we can afford to be generous with all that we have – our hands, our feet, our life and labor. What we cannot afford is to love money or the things that it can buy. Everything other than God is another "thing" that will pass away. We have so much more – Jesus, who has told us that he will be with us to the end of the age.

How do we live in a way that is authentic to our identity as people of abundance and hope? Pray daily (sustenance, peace, courage, forgiveness, accountability – relationship with God). Give yourself the gift of getting quiet and being in the presence of God. Listen for, and to, God's call on your life. Then follow up with acts of compassion and generosity. Who is sitting outside our gate? Just this weekend another makeshift home was set up outside of our church by those unnamed, unseen – and God's beloved. It will take a whole lot of God and community to care for these elusive neighbors. How do we feed so much starvation in our world, our deep poverty of body and spirit? Thanks be to God for the many ways in which the Church of the Redeemer is already active in this community in serving God's beloved children.

Even small efforts make a difference. Kindness is holding the door open for the person behind you. Say hello, please, thank you, God bless you. Invite your neighbors to dinner. Learn their names. Invite one another to coffee, for a walk; learn everyone's name. Show kindness, mercy.

In our households, try this significant spiritual practice: make the first check that you write each month be your donation to the church or to something else beyond yourself. Plan for this giving and try this action this month, next month, and beyond. Be amazed at what happens: we are changed! We make room for our giving so that it comes from the “first fruits” and not the leftovers. Tell one another how God is active in this practice. Share your stories.

My friends, the world needs our Savior. The world desperately needs our witness.

I am full of hope for how we, the faith community named the Church of the Redeemer, will go forward in the name of Christ, serving others, showing kindness and mercy. We are God’s beloved children, wearers of purple, rich in hope, love, and action.

You are invited, we are invited, to continue in the way of love. Love one another, and our neighbors as ourselves.