

Sermon: The House is on Fire
15 Pentecost, Year C
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Amos 8:4-7

Amos had no intention of being a writer of this Sunday's lectionary. Amos was a shepherd, a herdsman, a "dresser of sycamore trees." But one day or perhaps over the course of months, in the 8th c. BCE he began to hear a call from God to be a prophet. He likely ignored the call a few times, not sure he heard God's voice. Surely God wouldn't call him to leave his precious sheep and home in Judah to go north to Israel. He didn't feel equipped to speak truth to power, didn't think he was educated enough to prophesy.

The mood of those in the land of Israel was upbeat. It was a period of relative peace. For many it was a prosperous time --- at the expense of the poor. Amos writes, "Hear this, you that trample on the needy, and bring ruin to the poor of the land, saying, 'When will the new moon be over so we may sell grain; and the Sabbath, so that we may offer wheat for sale?'" So eager to make money! Containing their commercial greed over the Sabbath was making them anxious. Their prosperity had caused the people of Israel to be careless and corrupt, selfish and oppressive toward the poor.

Right before this passage Amos says that he is/was no prophet, no son of a prophet. This reluctant prophet seems to be called for a time out of the field, out of the role in which he would normally find himself simply because God called him to it! He has become known as a social justice prophet because he was called to speak the truth about God, to essentially say "The moral house is on fire", and to help bring the people into their better and more loving selves.

Many of you have heard about what could be called a modern day prophet, Greta Thunberg. When you first see her in a photo or video, you easily wonder how this child has gotten so much international attention. She is so young! The Swedish environmental activist, who has autism, says that she was deeply depressed about the ways our leaders around the world are neglecting our environment. One day she felt called to speak up and speak up she did!

Last November at age 15, she spoke at Parliament in Stockholm, then at the United Nation's Climate Change conference in Poland. A month later in Switzerland she told the rich and powerful that the "house is on fire." She says that people with Aspergers, aren't good at lying and not good at social games. She tells what she sees. She calls the world to pay attention. In March, 1.5 million school children around the world left school and took to the streets. Yesterday there were strikes planned in 500 places, including right here in Staunton. I know some of you were there. She said the symbolism of the school strikes is, "Since you adults don't give a damn about my future, I won't either." But while the reluctant activist is drawing quite a lot of attention to herself, her purpose is to get people to listen to the scientists.

Maybe you have no intention of being a prophet. And you want to stay snug in your complacency. But God calls us all - the famous, the not so famous, the old, the young, the educated and the not so educated, the shepherds and the school children. God calls us all to offer our gifts for a better, and more loving world. It's time to listen for God's call that appears to each of us in our own unique way with the gifts and weaknesses we have been given. Where do you feel the house is on fire? Is it in how we treat the poor? Are you worried about our precious planet? Notice where you are restless or dissatisfied with things, pray about it. When we respond to God's call, we will be given what we need to fulfill it. Be prepared to let God speak – thru you!

Amen.