

## *Each person is first called by God, then sent – a risky business.*

It has been said that charity from an atheist is pure...it strikes me that the same can be said of prophets – those who proclaim the unsettling word which calls folks to growth. The prophetic word coming from a non-prophet is pure.

When Amos in chapter 7 of our first reading says, “I’m no prophet,” he means he was and is no professional prophet. Professional oracle givers and charismatics were not uncommon in the ancient Near East, and for whatever benefits they had to offer they were maintained – fed and paid – by the people. And they were also looked down upon by many, including several of our canonical prophets who say that these professionals will prophesy whatever you want to hear – for a price. In other words, professional prophets were likely to be mercenary, false prophets.

So Amos refuses to be identified with them. He was a shepherd, a dresser by sycamores by occupation, an ordinary citizen – like you and like me – homemakers, students, craftsmen, folks who are still seeking God and have not fully found God. Amos has become a prophet not by profession but by genuine call of God, and the fact that he says such harsh things to

the powers that be is proof that he isn’t in the prophesy business for profit. The same can be said of us...if we say something about God or the moral life to a coworker or a neighbor, it’s not because we’re paid to do so – or in the case of clerics like me, we’re not in it for the money.

The reading from Amos is a prelude to the gospel, St. Mark chapter 6, wherein Jesus sends out the Twelve on a preaching and exorcism journey and requires that they carry with them the credentials of true prophets: they travel light, tell the truth without compromise, seek no gain from their mission.

To his disciples and to us, Jesus says, “Be free”: free from cringing concern over your material well-being, for if your sights are set on your next meal, how can you rejoice in the kingdom breaking in now? Be free from the burden of possessions, for if you are judged greedy and grasping, how can the poor ever feel connected with you and come to believe your message? Be free from the need for approval by the mighty, for if you find yourself watering down the gospel in order to be received in rich people’s homes, how will you stay faithful to the vision?

Jesus asks the Twelve to confront the evil of their day wherever they find it – in institutions, in homes, in the workplace. They’re not to be afraid to name evil

when they see it and to challenge evildoers to a change of heart and a change of action.

It's a risky business...this call and being sent. Our baptism has made us called to proclaim Christ and God's love in Christ. Sure, its part of our pastoral plan given us by the Pope and Bishops – we even visit neighborhoods – but we proclaim this good news right where we are everyday with all we meet. We who are at the table become what's on the table – the Lord Jesus Christ broken and given for the sake of the world. The poet Denise Levertov reflects on the routine that so many people endure: the very people who will be hearing our proclamation. She is watching cars go by as she does so:

“Life after life after life goes by  
without poetry,  
without seemliness,  
without love.”

Knowing well whom we are called to serve, having no illusions about our effectiveness, we rejoice in the commission the Lord has given us, commit our cause to the Lord, and find nourishment at this table for our mission. Let us pray: Good and gracious God, you call each of us to proclaim your word and with that call you give the strength needed for that proclamation in whatever way we are able. Enliven us with your Spirit; give us the peace that comes with confidence in your love. We ask all this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

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