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St. Luke's Episcopal Church ~ Anchorage, Kentucky
The Eighth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 10) July 9 & 10, 2016
Luke 10:25-37 & Amos 7:7-17

The work that goes behind the design and construction of a building or structure can be arduous and time-intensive and this process is to ensure that measurements are exact to ensure the safety and integrity of the final product. I can recall a building project that Joe managed several years ago in Florida where the completion of the project was significantly delayed because of a structural error that had been made in one of the elevator shafts. Joe said that the elevator was “out of plum” so they were not able to install the elevator. The error occurred because the measurements were made from a beginning point that was not level. Though the shaft looked to be straight, it was “out of plum” and the elevator could not be installed.

This anecdote serves well as a metaphor for the vision that Amos had, whether it be the ancient people of Israel, or us, we can sometimes fool ourselves, and others, in believing that things are all right. Sometimes have the tendency to look past or even refuse to recognize that things are ‘out of plum’ or not right. It can take a courageous voice to reveal to us that things are not just as we hope or wish for them to be. However, God used Amos, who was a simple herdsman and dresser of Sycamore trees, from a small village south of Jerusalem- to deliver cutting words of justice and truth to the people of Israel. God spoke to Amos through a vision where Amos sees a plum line suspended from the mud wall of a city. Now, If the wall isn't straight then the cord will hang away from the wall rather than alongside of the wall.

(A plum line is a cord with a weight (often lead) on end of the cord, which enables the measurer to see if a wall is vertically straight. Gravity makes the cord perpendicular to the ground, and when the unweighted end of the cord is held at the top of the wall, a clear visual

assessment of the wall can be made.) In the case of Amos' vision – Israel is not measuring up, as there is a serious flaw in the community's structure. Being inspired by God Amos envisions religious practices among the people that are completely void of compassion for the most vulnerable among them. The covenant set between God and his people in the midst of Israel had been jeopardized. God is a God of mercy and compassion, but they are not without bounds. Without accountability, covenant would have no meaning. God is a God of justice and a God of peace.

Have we, like the people of Israel, perhaps strayed off of the path that God – or even we ourselves intended to take? In today's society it seems as though many of us just want to be left alone and to our own devices. But we are children of almighty God and God, nor will the Church leave us alone, and I believe this is a good thing. God comes to us through words of others, as I have said before, or through words of a prophet like Amos. And He loves us enough to tell us the truth about who we truly are, and He holds us accountable to live the way that we are called to live as the children of God, which Jesus echoes "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind: and your neighbor as yourself."

So who is our neighbor? The Anglican tradition, of which the Episcopal Church is part of, embraces the belief that our neighbor is all of us. The goal is reconciliation and partnership with one another in a common journey to the kingdom of God. When we become divisive and exclusive because of socioeconomic, cultural, or racial, or a myriad of other differences – we stray off of the path of righteousness and hurt and pain within the body of Christ are the result. Jesus commands us to love our neighbor.

The parable of the Good Samaritan serves as a reminder of how we can get so busy and so caught up in our own affairs that we seldom choose to take the time to help our neighbor. Two of the men in this parable veered off of the path, while the Good Samaritan “stayed plum” in his walk with God, not weighing into account who the injured man (thought to be a Jew) was lying along the street. He saw an injured human being, A child of God. Love your neighbor.

Quote from Pope Francis ~ *I think we too are the people who, on the one hand, want to listen to Jesus, but on the other hand, at times, like to find a stick to beat others with, to condemn others. And Jesus has this message for us: mercy. I think — and I say it with humility — that this is the Lord's most powerful message: mercy.*

Mercy.