**Sunday, February 7th, 2021**

**Amos 5:12-15, 7:7-8, 8:4-7**

On their way home from school, Alexia and Becky stopped at the pharmacy

          to pick up a few things they needed for a school project.

As they walked along the isle of cosmetics,

          Becky slipped a tube of lipstick into her pocket.

They paid for the school supplies and left the store.

When they were outside, Alexia said: "I don't believe you took that lipstick."

Becky answered: "They'll never miss it.

          I just wanted to see if I could get away with it."

Mrs.  Pruitt, the 7 th grade teacher introduced the new student to the class.

"Juan has just moved here from Mexico.

          He will need some help with his English for a while."

But the students didn't interact with Juan at all.

They ignored him and let him struggle on his own.

Harold worked as a house builder in his father's company.

He was engaged to be married and wanted to build his own home.

But he didn't have the money he needed.

One morning his father showed him a building lot he had just purchased.

          "I want you to build the best house you can," he told Harold.

“Top quality all around.”

They discussed the budget and Harold started the project.

He soon realized he could make a tidy sum by cutting corners here and there – cheaper 2 nd rate materials and appliances and skipping on the extras.

When he finished, he had a enough extra money

          for a down payment on his own house.

His father shocked him when he gave Harold the keys to the house.

          "Your wedding present," he told Harold.

All of these people could have done better

          if they had been more familiar with the teachings of Amos.

Amos never planned to be a prophet.

He was a shepherd and took care of sycamore-fig trees.

But God told Amos to go and teach the people how they were to live.

Through Amos, God warned of the judgment

          which would come upon the nation for its disobedience.

But the people continued to turn away from God.

Amos proclaimed God's judgment upon his people

          for failing to live by God's standards of justice and righteousness.

In a vision Amos saw God standing near a wall, holding a plumb line,

          a weight suspended from a string used to make sure

          a wall or building was straight and true.

The standards of the people were wrong,

          and God wanted to teach them to live by His standards.

But the people continued to turn away from God.

They didn't really disobey on purpose.

They simply let other things get in their way.

Amos tried to teach the people what they were doing wrong,

          but they would not listen.

This is what the Lord says, listen to Him:

          Seek good and not evil, and the Lord will be with you.

          Let justice run down like water; and righteousness like a mighty stream.

          Love one another.

          Love your neighbor as yourself.

          Live God's way.

If the girls at the pharmacy had listened

          they would not have gotten in so much trouble

          when their parents and the police found out what they had done.

If the children in the 7th grade had listened,

          they might have discovered a new friend.

If Harold the house builder had listened,

          he would have had a much nicer home.

Yet sometimes we all forget to pay attention to what God tells us.

And when we forget, we miss out on some of the joy and peace

          we could experience by living according to God's standards.

We miss out when we don't pay attention to someone we could help.

We get ourselves in trouble when we don't listen to God.

Life is more meaningful and satisfying when we live his way.

We might not purposefully turn away from God.

More often we simply let other things distract us from loving and helping others.

Perhaps we all need a personal plumb line.

When we hold up God's standards we can more easily follow in his footsteps.

We, along with the Israelites of Amos' time,

          need to remember we ought not to use other people as our plumb line,

A spiritual plumb line is not to be used to compare ourselves to other people.

Most of us at times, compare ourselves favorably with someone else.

We can all think of someone whom we consider to be less mature,

          less competent, or less able than we are.

That person is a great comfort to us,

          because he or she enables us to keep our self-image intact by saying,

“Well, at least I'm not like so-and-so.”

The only problem with determining our self-worth

          by comparing ourselves with others

          is that we are using the wrong measuring stick.

Jesus told of a Pharisee who used a tax collector as his plumb line,

          thanking God that he was so much better by comparison.

But the tax collector compared himself

          to God's standard and realized his need for mercy.

It isn't that we may be better than other people,

          but are we aligned with God's plumb line?

We have been weighed, we have been measured,

          and we have been found wanting.

Yet God continues to forgive us,

          and helps us when we are not completely true to His plumb line.

Herman was 93 years old, but he insisted that he could drive a car

          just as well as he could at 39.

He was traveling down Interstate 74 when his cell phone rang.

It was his wife with an urgent warning:

          "Herman, I just heard on the news

          that there's a car going the wrong way on Interstate 74."

Herman said, "Honey, it's not just one car. It's hundreds of them."

Let us follow God's way

          so we do not make the same mistake as Herman,

          thinking we are the ones going the right way,

          even when we are in the wrong.

AMEN