



Sunday's Sermon

Pastor Lara Forbes



Growing Together in Christ to Love and Serve All People

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

July 11, 2021

Mark 6:14-29

Grace and peace to you from God, our Creator, and from our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

So...the gospel reading isn't very cheery, is it? And neither is the reading from Amos. Right? Neither one of them are easy to hear or make us feel comfortable. And they aren't supposed to. They are meant to challenge us and even make us squirm a little in our seats.

Because they're about the truth - specifically the truth that God speaks. And we know just from personal experience that when someone tells us the truth about ourselves or something we've done, especially if it's something that needs to be corrected, it *can* make us feel uncomfortable.

The risk is feeling uncomfortable for a minute and then saying, "Oh well" and going back to whatever it was that you were doing. And that's an option. But when God speaks the truth, ideally, we receive it. Because when we do, it opens our hearts and gives us the courage and the strength to live into it, even when it goes against what everyone else says and does.

That conflict is what's going on in Mark's gospel. John the baptizer had been telling Herod he was wrong to marry his brother's wife. And in those days, telling the king he was wrong was dangerous. We know the Roman government ruled by fear.

That fear tended to influence a lot of decisions that were made. And it's interesting that Herod only had John arrested and not simply killed after the first time John spoke out. And it's even more interesting that Herod *liked* to listen to John and what he had to say.

Because to use the image of the plumb line in the reading from Amos, Herod didn't measure up to what God expected of him. But Herod recognized that John was a prophet, and that there was truth in what he was saying.

What ultimately ends up happening, though, is that Herod gave honor to the wrong person at the wrong time and backed himself into a corner. And he didn't have the moral courage to do the right thing, which cost John his life.

In Mark's gospel, John the baptizer's execution is what set Jesus' ministry in motion. Through John, God spoke the truth - not only about who Herod was, but also about how dangerous the governing system and culture were at that time, about how things could and should be better not just for Herod but for everyone.

After John's death, through Jesus, God continued to speak the truth - about who Jesus was, and about the nearness of God's realm and what that meant for people. It didn't make Jesus popular with everyone, especially the people who were in power. They recognized the truth he spoke and what it meant for them.

Ultimately, speaking that truth and living into it cost Jesus *his* life, too. The good news, is that God continued to speak the truth about Jesus through Jesus' disciples - who continued to share it with others and expand Jesus' ministry like spokes on a wheel. We talked about that last week.

When we carry that image forward to now, we understand that God still speaks the truth to us today - the truth of who God is, what God wants for ourselves, our lives, and our congregation - that God names each of us "Beloved" and wants us to do the same for one another.

We hear God's truth from modern-day prophets in our world, and it's even spoken through people in our own lives.

But this isn't always an easy truth to live into. The world pushes back against it constantly and tries to drown it out. So some times are easier than others to recognize it and what it means for us. Because with the world the way it is, we worry about what others will think of us. We worry about whether we've done enough or are good enough.

But when we receive the truth that *God* speaks, it opens our hearts and changes us. It empowers us to live into it, even when it isn't easy.

When I served in Phoenix, I had a conversation with a congregation member that I didn't handle well. The details of it aren't important; but even in that moment, I knew I had messed up.

A few days later, another congregation member who had been a part of that conversation asked to talk with me. And they didn't say what about, but I knew it was about what I'd said. As we were sitting down, I was thinking, "Oh man, this is gonna be hard."

And they said, "You hurt so-and-so's feelings the other day. It isn't that what you said was wrong, but you could have handled it better." And they were right. They didn't yell, and their intent wasn't to make me feel bad. It was to tell me the truth about what I'd done. I knew that.

No contest, it's one of the least comfortable conversations I've ever had. *No one* likes to have their mistakes pointed out to them. But it needed to be done. And I was grateful even then that that person took the time to be truthful with me.

And because they took that time, not only was I able to make it right with the other person, it shaped how I've handled similar conversations since then - for the better.

When we're able to hear it, the truth God speaks opens our hearts and changes us. In the times when we've done something wrong to someone else, it offers us the opportunity to set things right. But God's truth speaks to situations beyond that.

When we're able to hear the truth God speaks about who we are as a congregation, we're able to honor not only who we've been and who we are now, we're also able to think about who we're becoming. We're able to envision possibilities for mission and ministry that may not have been obvious before.

Over these last 16 months, ministry here at Saint Andrew's didn't stop. We continued to worship even when we couldn't be here in the building. We adapted to technology and extended our reach, effectively creating an online campus and community. This ministry is now a permanent part of our identity, and it will continue to evolve and improve.

We've also begun to extend our outreach through conversations about intentional LGBTQ+ inclusion and racial equity. Having these discussions through the lens of God's truth enables us to work through our disagreements and still love each other as we learn more about ourselves, and they will shape who we become as a community.

God's truth speaks volumes. And when we're able to hear it - to receive it, we remember that it's rooted in God's love for us. At its core, God's truth speaks to us about how loved each of us is. It reminds us that God names each of us "Beloved" and wants us to recognize that within ourselves and one another.

And for as powerful as that is, it isn't always an easy truth to live into because the world seeks to tell us otherwise. But when we remind one another of it, when we live into God's truth that each of us is beloved, it opens our hearts and changes us.

It shapes how we are with each other. And regardless of what the world says, God's truth empowers us to want and seek what is best for one another, whether it's our friends or family, or our church community or the world itself. And as we do, God's truth continues to be spoken and shared. Thanks be to God! Amen.