

Pericope Study for Sunday, July 12, 2015 – Lectionary 15B

Presented Tue 7/7/15 by Richard Burgess

Lectionary Complications:

This week begins the first of 7 weeks in Ephesians. In 2 weeks there will be 5 weeks of John 6 Bread of Life. And in 4 weeks there will be 3 weeks of Psalm 34. There are some great texts and opportunities for creative series here, but you can only do one without breaking up one of the others. (Or is that one of the opportunities?) What are the possibilities? What are the costs and benefits of your various options? What does your congregation need to hear this summer? What do you need to study? What is the Spirit telling you?

Collect / Prayer of the Day (ELW)

Aka “Collect for Peace”

O God, from you come all holy desires, all good counsels, and all just works. Give to us, your servants, that peace which the world cannot give, that our hearts may be set to obey your commandments; and also that we, being defended from the fear of our enemies, may live in peace and quietness, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

Possible Sermon Titles for Lectionary 15B

As usual, use at your own risk.

	Amos	Eph	Mk
NIMBY / Not in My Back Yard	X		
The Truth Is Way Overrated	X		
Who’s Conspiring against Whom?	X		
Who’s Sanctuary Is This?	X		
According to . . .		X	
According to His Good Pleasure		X	
Believed, Marked, Pledged, Redeemed		X	
Chosen before the Foundation		X	
The Praise of His Glory		X	
Where Are Your Blessings?		X	
Be Careful What You Promise			X
Delivered on a Platter			X
Is Keeping Your Word a Good Idea?			X
Who Is Jesus?			X

Old Testament: Amos 7:7-15 (NRSV)

⁷This is what he showed me: the LORD was standing beside a wall built with a plumb line, with a plumb line in his hand. ⁸And the LORD said to me, "Amos, what do you see?" And I said, "A plumb line." Then the LORD said,

"See, I am setting a plumb line
in the midst of my people Israel;
I will never again pass them by;
⁹the high places of Isaac shall be made desolate,
and the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid
waste,
and I will rise against the house of Jeroboam
with the sword."

¹⁰Then Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, sent to King Jeroboam of Israel, saying, "Amos has conspired against you in the very center of the house of Israel; the land is not able to bear all his words.

¹¹For thus Amos has said,

'Jeroboam shall die by the sword,
and Israel must go into exile
away from his land.'"

¹²And Amaziah said to Amos, "O seer, go, flee away to the land of Judah, earn your bread there, and prophesy there; ¹³but never again prophesy at Bethel, for it is the king's sanctuary, and it is a temple of the kingdom."

¹⁴Then Amos answered Amaziah, "I am no prophet, nor a prophet's son; but I am a herdsman, and a dresser of sycamore trees, ¹⁵and the LORD took me from following the flock, and the LORD said to me, 'Go, prophesy to my people Israel.'

Notes, Observations, and Thought Questions:

Context: Amos' ministry was in the Northern Kingdom (ie, Israel) in the early 8th century BCE (ca 783 -746 BCE). Originally from the southern kingdom, he prophesied in the northern kingdom.

Look for irony, misdirection, false claims, etc in this passage.

7.7-9 *This is what he showed me: The LORD . . .* Ie, this is a vision.

7.7 *plumb line* Do you need to explain to your congregation what a plumb line is? What can you do with this metaphor? Is there a better, more contemporary equivalent?

7.8 *I will never again pass them by* A double entendre? Irony? Threat?

7.10 *Amos has conspired . . .* The prophets prophesy not just against individuals, but also against structures, nations, institutions. Ie, against people who are in effect, if not in actual intention, conspiring against God.

Note these misnomers or claims thereof:

7.10 Amaziah: *Amos has conspired*

7.14 Amos: *I am no prophet . . .*

Who is telling "the truth"? How is "the truth" making or missing the point?

7.13-14 What are the problems involved when we try to control when and where God's word is proclaimed?

7.13 *it is the king's sanctuary . . . a temple of the kingdom* What about God? Has this happened in any of our congregations?

7.14-15 Prophets are generally thought of as people who speak for God. What is Amos denying when he says "I am no prophet . . ."?

Epistle: Ephesians 1:3–14

³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, ⁴just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. ⁵He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, ⁶to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. ⁷In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace ⁸that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight ⁹he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, ¹⁰as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. ¹¹In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, ¹²so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. ¹³In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; ¹⁴this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory.

Notes, Observations, and Thought Questions:

1.1-2 Why has the salutation been omitted? Costs / benefits of including it?

1.3 *blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing* What is a *spiritual blessing*? What does it mean for them to be *in Christ*?

1.3 *in the heavenly places* What are “the heavenly places”? Is heaven a place? What does the plural signify? Multiple heavens? Multiple places in heaven? Something analogous to the “royal we”? Is there language that might be easier for our listeners to relate to?

1.5 *He destined us for adoption . . .* What does “destined” mean in this context? Who does the “us” refer to? This is important throughout this passage — who is “us”?

1.7 How is *forgiveness of our trespasses* equivalent to *redemption*? What is the pastoral value of explicating this?

1.8b-9 *With all wisdom and insight he has made known to us . . .* What is this “wisdom and insight”?

1.10 *a plan . . . to gather up all things in him . . .* There can be great hope in / for this, but also fear. What is the best way to handle this?

1.12 & 14 *we . . . might live for the praise of his glory . . .* ¹⁴*this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory.* Is this what Ignatius was referring to in the *Spiritual Exercises*: “(People are)created to praise, reverence, and serve God our Lord, and by this means to save (their) soul(s).”? (The *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius: Based on Studies in the Language of the Autograph (Kindle Locations 178-179). Kindle Edition.)

1.13 *marked with the seal of the promised Holy spirit* Cf Is 3.11 as it appears in our baptism service: Sustain <name> with the gift of your Holy Spirit: the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord, the spirit of joy in your presence, both now and forever. (ELW p 231)

Gospel: Mark 6:14–29

¹⁴King Herod heard of it, for Jesus' name had become known. Some were saying, "John the baptizer has been raised from the dead; and for this reason these powers are at work in him."

¹⁵But others said, "It is Elijah." And others said, "It is a prophet, like one of the prophets of old."

¹⁶But when Herod heard of it, he said, "John, whom I beheaded, has been raised."

¹⁷For Herod himself had sent men who arrested John, bound him, and put him in prison on account of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, because Herod had married her. ¹⁸For John had been telling Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." ¹⁹And Herodias had a grudge against him, and wanted to kill him. But she could not, ²⁰for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he protected him. When he heard him, he was greatly perplexed; and yet he liked to listen to him. ²¹But an opportunity came when Herod on his birthday gave a banquet for his courtiers and officers and for the leaders of Galilee. ²²When his daughter Herodias came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his guests; and the king said to the girl, "Ask me for whatever you wish, and I will give it."

²³And he solemnly swore to her, "Whatever you ask me, I will give you, even half of my kingdom."

²⁴She went out and said to her mother, "What should I ask for?" She replied, "The head of John the baptizer." ²⁵Immediately she rushed back to the king and requested, "I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter."

²⁶The king was deeply grieved; yet out of regard for his oaths and for the guests, he did not want to refuse her. ²⁷Immediately the king sent a soldier of the guard with orders to bring John's head. He went and beheaded him in the prison, ²⁸brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the girl. Then the girl gave it to her mother. ²⁹When his disciples heard about it, they came and took his body, and laid it in a tomb.

Notes, Observations, and Thought Questions:

6.14-16 Context for 6.17-29: After hearing of the mission of the 12 disciples Herod, et al, speculated about who Jesus is and in v17-29 Herod took action.

6.20 Herod was conflicted. How can this story be helpful to those of us and our congregations who are conflicted?

6.22 *his daughter Herodias* What about the Herodias in 6.17 whom Herod married? Herodias Sr & Herodias Jr? ☺ NRSV text note: "Other ancient authorities read *the daughter of Herodias herself*."

6.22 *his daughter Herodias came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his guests*; This must have been quite a dance. Implications?

6.23-26 *he solemnly swore to her . . . even half of my kingdom*. What can we learn from Herod's oath regarding the importance of our word? About holding people to their word or not? About trusting our spouses &/o in laws?

This is a truly bizarre, gruesome, grotesque story, even achieving an R (or at times X) rating in Strauss' opera *Salome* (the traditional name of Herodias' daughter). Is there a "spiritual" meaning beyond the ethical moral of not making promises we can't keep?

The OT & Gospel lessons are usually linked; how so here? Is the connection between Amos and John the Baptist or Amos and Jesus?