

Church of the Good Shepherd
and
St. John the Evangelist

16 Pentecost
September 19, 2004
Fr. Bill McGinty

“God’s Hobo”

In last week’s sermon we spoke of this church, the church of the Good Shepherd as a refuge for the lost lamb, the weak, the poor and the outcast. Little did Sam and I know then, that one week later we would be included in that number? For last night we had to sleep here, when we were evacuated from the flooding in Matamoros. I suppose for one night we felt a little like refugees and that in itself has to be a good thing. There are millions of people, including our brothers and sisters in Kajo Keji, who are genuine refugees and we should and must identify with them. All of us identify with our birthplace, our home and where we were brought up. To lose all of that is to lose identity, self-esteem and even hope for the future.

Today’s reading tells the story of two men. One is Amos in the Old Testament and the other is Paul in the New. Amos is a man whose home is in the South. We think he was a farmer or a shepherd. Later he tells us that God spoke to him and chose him to be his Prophet while he tended his sheep under the almond tree. It just happens that the word for almond and the word for watcher are the same in Hebrew. So the writer was telling us that Amos was from the first God’s watcher, his Prophet over God’s people. Amos is commissioned to go to Bethel, the largest town in Northern Israel. Bethel stands on a hill and was a Canaanite shrine and temple long before the Israelites crossed the desert into the Promised Land. Now that the Northern Kingdom of Israel has broken away from the South, the people of Bethel have begun to worship the Canaanite God Baal at the Pagan Shrine.

Amos is the perfect man to confront them. Amos is brave and courageous. He always speaks his mind and says it as it is. Amos is a prophet in the classic archetypal style. In Bethel he confronts the rich, the leaders and the priests and tells them the truth as he sees it. The truth is hard for them to hear. Amos does not dress it up, “they trample the needy, they ruin the poor. Their actions are full of greed and conceit.” Amos tells them that God will reverse what he did for them in Egypt. He will bring them death and visit their land with famine.

Reading the New York Times over the last three years, you have to wonder and ask “What has changed?” in the 2729 years since Amos. What has changed? In the last three years we have had corporate scandal after scandal. Employees of twenty, and thirty years losing benefits and pensions; rich executives stealing hundreds of millions of dollars, and CEO’s putting their companies into receivership while they retire to a Caribbean Island they now own. Thousands of jobs have been lost and with them homes and families destroyed. We have had insider trading and values on shares falsely inflated till the deal is done and then they become worthless overnight. Where is our Amos who would stand up on behalf of the little man and say, “This is wrong!” Do you know that since *Enron* not one piece of legislation has passed on the floor of either House to stop white collar crime in our

The Rev. William J. McGinty, Rector
110 West Catharine Street, Milford, Pennsylvania 18337
Phone: (570) 296-8123 ♦ Fax: (570) 296-4383

Church of the Good Shepherd

and

St. John the Evangelist

markets? And, we are talking crime that makes drug running look like spare change in a Drug Lords pocket. Listen to this sound, can you hear it? (pause) It's the sound of silence. It is the sounds you will hear most frequently from either candidate in this Presidential election when it comes to fair trading and the subject of corporate corruption.

A few years ago I stopped giving to major charities such as Oxfam, Cafod, and many more when I learned that 75% of the money they receive for the Third World and Africa, in particular, goes to pay the fat salaries of their own employees. Now I work directly with institutions in the countries involved or with servicemen who are involved in projects such as schools or orphanages in a particular country. Today, the rage of Amos the prophet would be no less intense at the blight of the poor. Amos does not merely threaten; his words cut through the air like a sword, like an arrow they find their mark and he is always right.

“Woe to you who desire the day of the Lord. For what good is the day of the Lord to you? It will be darkness, not light. It will be as if a man fled from a lion, and a bear met him. Or as though he entered a house, leaned against a wall and a snake bit him. Is not the day of the Lord darkness not light?”

Amos' message is clear; no matter how long it takes, God will have his Justice and it will fall hard on those who make the lives of the poorest worse, and hide their deeds in darkness.

We do not appear to have too many voices like that of Amos today. Perhaps the last was that of Bishop Desmond TuTu of Johannesburg, South Africa, who for forty years told the Africans Party that Apartheid was wrong and God would free his people.

In today's 2nd reading the Apostle Paul follows in the prophetic steps of Amos. While Amos was a poor uneducated farmer, Paul was a brilliant lawyer, a scholar, and a theologian. But they had the same temperament and the same love of the truth. Amos and Paul set out on a mission with a fierce belief that they had been sent by God, both fiery, and indeed on fire, with God's word.

At times Paul gets a little touchy about criticisms leveled at him by other Christians. He seems to see the need to defend himself against these attacks. Several times he complains that he is every bit an Apostle as the other twelve even though he did not meet Jesus till his conversion on the Road to Damascus. But, he wants everyone to know that Jesus commissioned and sent him out to bring the Word to the Gentile world. He speaks of being shipwrecked three times; receiving thirty- nine lashes seven times, being imprisoned many times and even being stoned once. All of these, he tells his reader, he endured gladly for the Gospel.

Amos and Paul are alike in another way. They both left home and journeyed far, never to return. Paul in particular seems to have this total commitment to the church and it is Christ that blinds him to all else. He never marries, has no children, but writes some of the

The Rev. William J. McGinty, Rector
110 West Catharine Street, Milford, Pennsylvania 18337
Phone: (570) 296-8123 ♦ Fax: (570) 296-4383

Church of the Good Shepherd

and

St. John the Evangelist

most beautiful words on married love ever written. He makes deep friendships, often and easily, but constantly moves on and leaves them behind. People like him; he is a teller of stories, and he is so steeped in Christ that it pours out of him in words and writing. At the end of his life he speaks of being burnt-up, at the end of a race, he has finished the course.

He dies alone, separated from all his friends and the many churches he began in the East. He dies in Rome, in the same year as Peter, but it is probable they never met in the city. He dies like a candle flame that has given its all.

Amos and Paul remind us of our true identity as Christians, for even if the commitments of the everyday makes us forget that God speaks to us each day in their lives, we see this total response to God and his truth. Once Paul is called by Jesus on that Road to Damascus his whole life changes and forever. He can no longer go home to Tarsus, nor be the brilliant lawyer in Jerusalem; now he has to be God's Hobo, always on the road, always moving, searching, seeking to tell the Gospel to one more town, one more place, and one more person.

Today's Gospel is the oddest of parable stories. It is the story of a servant, who is wise in the ways of the world, but untrustworthy with his master's property. Luke wants to tell us that as disciples we cannot serve God and money. The parable makes it seem as if the Servant is to be admired, but it really is not the case.

I suppose the story poses the question for all of us: can we compromise and try to meet God half way? After all, if all our life was dedicated to the Gospel, like Paul, who would pay the bills?

Maybe the answer is that "paying the bills" is different from real wealth. No one ever speaks against working for a living in the Gospels. Jesus is a carpenter; Peter, Andrew, James and John are fishermen, and Matthew, a tax collector. Luke was a doctor and even Paul paid his bills as a tent maker.

All these readings today tell us that there is a price to be paid for following Jesus' call. But it has more to do with our own personal identity, our time and our commitment than it has with money. Even if we cannot find that 100% total response of Paul and Amos, every now and then the Gospel and our Christian identity will shake us up and ask us also, for that extra mile, that extra sacrifice.

In a very few weeks we will be coming up on our annual Pledge Drive in the parish. It is our Road to Damascus time where we each, privately and secretly meet Jesus. He doesn't ask us why we persecute him. He asks us what are we prepared to do for him in the coming year. "What are you prepared to do to bring my Kingdom, my Gospel alive in this place?" With his hand in our hand, Jesus will ask each one of us that question.

Today I ask you in the coming weeks to think of your Pledge in the coming year as your covenant with the Lord. Your response to his words: "Feed my sheep." I want you to pray

The Rev. William J. McGinty, Rector
110 West Catharine Street, Milford, Pennsylvania 18337
Phone: (570) 296-8123 ♦ Fax: (570) 296-4383

Church of the Good Shepherd
and
St. John the Evangelist

about it alone and together as a couple and as a family. Here in this church we have seen the Holy Spirit bless us, both with numbers, with generous service of so many, and with liturgies, weddings, memorials and baptisms. God has visited his people. In the next four weeks pray and make this church his ministry and wait to see God's response. This we ask in Jesus' name.

Amen +

The Rev. William J. McGinty, Rector
110 West Catharine Street, Milford, Pennsylvania 18337
Phone: (570) 296-8123 ♦ Fax: (570) 296-4383