

WHY AND AFFECTS

I was told, yesterday, by a number of people that "It's summertime; you don't need to preach a sermon. Just say a few sentences, and everybody would be glad."

Well,..... after some contemplation, which included the fact that I've never preached on either one of these texts, I decided we'll sing the closing song, now..... and Just kidding.

These are fascinating passages, and I'd regret not presenting them,..... so..... let's begin with Amos.

The Amos text is yet another Bible passage about the necessity of doing justice--God's justice of the able and powerful helping the weak and powerless / of leveling the playing field.

The message begins with the illustration of the basket of beautiful summer fruit.

Suggesting, all appears bountiful and lavish.

Scholars state that the occasion is likely the "Feast of the Tabernacles", which is a big celebration for the harvest and the beginning of the new year. In those days, the new year began in the fall. It was a New Year's Eve party.

Speeches would typically add to the festivities with proclamation of hope and optimism.

Yet surprisingly, Amos preached that the good times are over, and it's too late to repent. The consequences of greed, hoarding and exploitation will happen.

He calls it God's judgment,.....which is God withdrawing God self..... and allowing the results of their bad behaviour to play out.

Verses 4 through 6 are the charges: citations of their destructive and abusive society.

They trampled on the needy. They crushed the poor and ruined the environment.

They fueled a automobile culture, instead of providing cheap mass transit that the poor could use and that would be friendly to the earth.

And.....they didn't honor the Sabbath.

The Sabbath was more than just a time of rest. The Sabbath meant restoration / jubilee / a restart for all.

Then Amos notes God's response and the usual consequences of abetting an unjust system.

When a society is out of balance--when the rich get richer and the poor poorer, then before long..... things will get ugly and nasty for everyone!

This indictment is "personal" for me.

Notice in verse 10, included in the judgment, along with songs of lamentation, is the penalty of "baldness on every head."

So,.....take heed,..... I'm [] like the canary in the coal mine.

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As I mentioned before, this is not a call to repentance..... because it's too late. The damage has been done.

It's **not** too late to change, but it's too late to avoid the results.

It's prudent to throw water on a burning house. Water can halt the destruction, yet the water will NOT restore what is already burnt.

To another house: Martha's house.

From the Luke passage, Mary is Martha's sister, and Mary is a student of Jesus. The idiom "to sit at feet" means to study under someone. This is unusual because in those day, Rabbis did not teach women, but Jesus did.

Meanwhile, as Jesus was teaching, Martha had become quite perturbed because she was stuck doing all the hosting obligations.

Martha felt that Mary was taking advantage of her, and so she asked Jesus to tell Mary to help her with the serving instead of listening to Jesus.

However, Jesus remarks that Martha is trying to do too much and that Mary is doing exactly what she needs to be doing.

Martha had high expectations for herself, and projected them on Mary. She believed that Mary should have her same standards and sense of duty.

It is all too common to think that others should be like ourselves--have our same values, drive.... and standards. That assumption only causes resentment and bitterness, regardless of how perfect or logical one's perception is.

So does this mean that being over-responsible / hardworking and dutiful is wrong? Should we all be more carefree and nonchalant?

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In the pursuit to simplify life so that we can avoid stress and incongruence, we humans tend to label and categorize things and people.

We seek to determine what is right, what is wrong, who is good and who is bad, so we can make sense of problems..... and move on.

Yet, life is not so discernible. People are not so pure--one way or the other.

In the words of some wise philosopher, "IT all depends."

Those at the social justice end of the spectrum are quick to demonize big business and consider wealthy entrepreneurs as robber barons, well,..... that's what John D Rockefeller and other tycoons were called a 100 years ago.

In contrast, those at the other end of the spectrum, the free-market/capitalism end, tend to idolize and worship the billionaire entrepreneurs. They see them as models who not only excelled in getting rich, butAlso boasted the economy so others could profit, too.

Interesting,.....life is not so simple and clean cut.

Johan Noberg wrote "The Heroes of the world", and he asserts that entrepreneurs are heroes that have made the world into a better place.

He credits the likes of Bill Gates, Donald Trump, Steve Jobs, Richard Branson, Mark Zuckerberg, and many others with raising the standard of living while reducing poverty.

He thanks free-market entrepreneurs for causing the increase of wealth and life expectancy in the past 100 years, that was greater than in the previous 100,000 years.

He is partly correct,..... and partly incorrect.

In addition, capitalistic motivated entrepreneurs are Amoral, and thus not worthy to be heroes.

Nevertheless, entrepreneurial creativity and devotion has wrought many benefits,..... and so "IT all depends."

Moreover, there are many types of entrepreneurs, including "Social entrepreneurs".

In the words of Bill Drayton,

"Social entrepreneurs are not content just to give a fish or teach how to fish. They will not rest until they have revolutionized the fishing industry." Social entrepreneurs are not pursuing personal power.

Businessmen, Big business, little businesses and entrepreneurs come in all shapes and sizes,..... and "It all depends."

In regards to Martha: her way of honouring Jesus was to serve him.

She was doing service, and that is good, yet..... she was trying to do too much,..... and she was expecting Mary to have her same value.

Some people do service for God. Some seek to learn more and simply be close to Jesus. Other people choose to teach or preach or pray or sing or care for the church as acts of faithfulness.

We are all different, and that's okay.

What matters in what we do / how we live as individuals and as a community,... all depends on..... the "WHY and the Affect."

The reason we do what we do makes a huge difference.

It is one thing for Martha to be a diligent host because she needs to make a good impression or is afraid of disappointing Jesus.

Fear and insecurity are not healthy motivations because they taint even good actions, and turn them ugly.

It is quite another matter if Martha lovingly desires to please and ease her guests, including Jesus.

Based on Martha's reaction to Mary, I think the "Why" she was doing what she was doing was a problem. Her diligent, good service for Jesus was counterproductive because of her motivation.

Also, "Good intentions" / upright motivation is just half of the equation. The other half is the affects. It matters how our actions impact others, regardless of altruistic desires.

The compassion to warm someone on a cold winter's night is admirable. The action of lighting a fire can be a very kind deed for someone who is chilled. The action of fire starting is benign. Yet, if the fire catches the house on fire, then that result is not so good.

The "why" and the "Affect" are the "active" ingredients in life.
"It all depends..... on the reason and the result."

It is okay to wealthy. It is fine to work to make money, and we need entrepreneurs and risk takers. It's the "why" and the "affect" that makes the difference.

When the motivation is fear, insecurity and greed, then compassion for others diminishes,..... and the weak and poor suffer, and often the environment suffers, too.

Even when the ideal is noble, the results must be carefully assessed.

Over a decade ago, it was nice gesture by the US government to make it easier for people to buy homes, yet the policy invited speculators and caused a housing bubble. Combined with the prevalent greed and other factors, the 2008 collapse was the consequence..... and many suffered from it. The result of good intentions was bad.

Another example is weddings.
Weddings are suppose to be wondrous and joyous occasions.
Families come together and formulate a ceremony that will delight the bride, the groom and all involved.

However, the event can spin out of control when the reasons / the "why" are not wholesome.

It was recently reported that the average wedding in the US costs \$28,000.
Does it really need to cost that much to have a wondrous and joyous wedding?

I've been involved in many weddings, and some turned out to be disastrous..... because the motivation was skewed. Some people had the need to make a statement, to have everything perfect or better their friend's wedding or whatever. Bride and groom were stressed, parents were irritated, and things didn't go right.
All smiled for the photos, yet most were glad it was over,..... expect for the ones paying the bills.

As with life, weddings can be delightful occasions,..... when the "why" in preparation is good and when there is a concern on how it will affect others.

Why we do what we do..... makes a difference.
The why affects who we are. It affects how we relate to God, and it affects others, too, including all of creation.

Similar to the situation Amos describes, our culture is tilted towards greed and exploitation. Our cultural motivation is not aligned for good results, and there will be consequences.

Again, citing an American statistic,.....and I apologize for that. It seems the flow of information in Canada needs a plunger.

Anyways, ... the stat is that children living in poverty rose to 23% in 2011 from 19% in 2005. Our Western culture is not trending well right now, and I fear our house is on fire.

Yet, we are not without hope.
God has called lots of "spiritual" firemen and firewomen.

And, the beauty of the Gospel message is the realization / the discovery of potential / ofnew beginnings.

Moreover, we / people / life is not static like a building.
We can change. We can heal. We can grow and we can learn.

Today's passages have invited us to explore the why / our drive / our motivation in making decisions.
And, we are prompted to access how our actions / our choices impact others.

This is a nice and worthy lesson, albeit a bit shallow,..... if we fail to appreciate that all people are God's children.
God loves them all, and God doesn't take kindly when abuse happens to any one of them.

And,..... that includes you and me.
Carelessly, our choices can be self-abusive.

Life is complex and life is short.
Even so, life can be wondrous and beautiful,..... when we love and respect / when we truly give instead of taking.

That's the Gospel lesson and the Old Testament lesson for today.