

“Bearing all his words”

Sometimes life seems like one problem stacked on top of another until they become too big to deal with – we don’t know how to address them, or we’re afraid to address them – and so we run away from them, deny them, pretend like the problems don’t exist.

To do so is to live a lie – afraid of the consequences of the truth. “If I tell my parents what I’m really up to, they won’t let me hang out with a certain friend.” “If I tell my spouse the truth, I’m afraid it will lead to a divorce.”

The truth does have consequences. The truth can be painful at times – a heavy burden to bear – and so we block it out, pretend that it doesn’t really exist – rather than be crushed by its consequences.

The people of Israel had the same problem with their problems. They didn’t want to deal with the truth either – “the land is not able to bear all [the words the prophet Amos was speaking to them].” Amos is but the mouthpiece – the words, the truth – is the Lord’s, who says – “Jeroboam shall die by the sword, and Israel must go into exile away from his land.”

The truth is that Israel had turned their back on God – worshipping false gods. Rather than “fear, love and trust” in the God who had created them, redeemed them, and sanctified them – they turned their hope and trust to gods created by their own hands.

At Bethel (the house of God), the very place that Jacob (Israel) saw the angels ascending and descending on the ladder – the very “gate of heaven” – the descendants of Israel set up a golden calf and worshipped it as their god – just as their forefathers had done at the foot of Mt. Sinai.

These are the people to whom God sends His prophet Amos – His own, beloved and chosen people. He sends him to speak His truth – words of doom and destruction – harsh words – unwelcome words – words too heavy for them to bear.

In stubbornness, anger and denial – God’s people shut their ears to His Word. “There’s no way King Jeroboam is going to die, he’s such a spiritual man – look at all the worship sites he’s erected.”

There’s no way our nation is going into exile – just look around – see how prosperous we are – how good we are --- God is pleased with us, after all, we are His “chosen nation.”

“So, leave us alone Amos! Go back to where you came from. Be quiet – stop talking about our sin and its consequences.”

“If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” Israel was deceiving themselves – trying to justify themselves – making excuses for their idolatry – ignoring God’s truth, and living a lie.

Like Israel, we often construct our own little world – our own lifestyle, our own agenda – with our own little sanctuaries and temples, which we guard zealously against any intruder – against anything that would try to come in and change our world/kingdom.

Even God Himself is seen as an intruder – whose words are too heavy to bear – and so we shut them out, close our ears – shutting God out of our lives, exiling Him from our kingdom.

And yet, like Israel of old, the Lord doesn’t simply dispose of us – wiping us off the face of the earth – even though that is what we deserve. No, He comes to us – preaching to us His truth – which, at times, are strong words, uncompromising words, burdensome words.

God loves you so much that He comes to deal with your sin and false belief. He loves you enough to reveal your sin, and accuse you by His Law, until you cannot stand up under the weight of His Word. In other words, the Lord comes to crush you.

I know, that sounds ungodly – and yet, it is a most loving thing for Him to do. Unless He crushes us – shows us our sin and the damnation it deserves – and the judgment that is coming because of our unfaithfulness – then we have no life in us.

The death of Jeroboam and the exile of Israel are a foreshadowing of the death and eternal separation from God that is to come – to all who do not “fear, love and trust in God above all things.”

That is God’s preaching of repentance – the very message proclaimed by Amos, and John the Baptist, and Jesus, and His Apostles. And it these burdensome words that must continue to be proclaimed to the cold and stubborn hearts of sinners today – as Jesus Himself says – “that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all nations ...”

If God does not call you to repentance – you will continue to live a lie – pretending that God approves of your idolatry – how you have arranged your life, your kingdom, with your own truths. To live in denial of God’s truth – without repentance – is to live in danger of the judgment that is coming upon all people who live apart from faith in Christ.

“If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us” – but when we confess our self-absorption, the building of our own little kingdoms, our rejection of God’s Word, our fear of the truth, and our lack of faith that the Lord will uphold and carry us through all sufferings and trials --- when we confess our sins, the truth IS in us – even Jesus Christ Himself.

As we heard from St. Paul this morning – “In [Christ] we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace, which He lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight.” In Christ, you are bought back – ransomed – set free – restored to God your heavenly Father.

In this truth, this Gospel – in repentance we stand upon the Rock which is Christ and boldly confess – here is my sanctuary and temple – here is my refuge and strength, my standing before God, and before my neighbor – here, in Christ, is my forgiveness, life and salvation, as God’s beloved child. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.