

Good News Daily

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Sunday, November 28

Luke 21:5-19 *“As for these things which you see, the days will come when there shall not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.”* (v.6 RSV)

Pharaoh crumbled into desert sand. No one can find Solomon’s bronze cherubim. The Emperor of China’s tea pot is a museum piece, and mildew grows up the walls of the Medici palace. It isn’t the wrath of God that brings down our empires; they fall under the weight of our own corruption, arrogance, greed, sloth, and religion that has lost its soul.

My own small kingdom, myself, was programmed, even before I was born, to die. Our country seems bent on its own destruction. What should we do?

“This will be a time for you to bear testimony,” Jesus said. Be strong for the weak, defend the helpless. Have the courage to be pure, to be honest, to be generous and merciful. Don’t run with the crowd, don’t laugh with the cruel. Trust God, hold to Christ. Then your life will be your testimony to the kingdom that lasts forever.

Amos 1:1-5, 13—2:8; Psalms 146, 147; 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

Monday, November 29

Amos 2:6-16 *“And I raised up some of your sons for prophets.”* (v.11a)

God gave us Amos for our time—the shepherd from the wilderness of Tekoa, the dresser of sycamore trees. Today, he lives in Montana raising sheep and tending his orchards. In his solitude, he feels God’s nearness; he sees God’s hand in the order of the stars, in the faithfulness of the seasons, in the obedience of the beasts.

In his flannel shirt and jeans, he comes into the city to sell his wool and fruit. He watches the women strut by in their floor length mink; he hears of living babies thrown into dumpsters.

The media tell him stories of corruption and depravity. Advanced technology deafens him with dissonance; vulgarity leers at him and is applauded. He watches mindless crowds worshiping disreputable idols. Across the street from luxury apartments renting for \$9,000 a month, the homeless huddle in doorways.

Amos knows that the barbarians were already within the gates. God sent prophets to help us see ourselves as we are.

Psalms 1, 2, 3; 2 Peter 1:1-11; Matthew 21:1-11

Happy Birthday Sue Willard!

Tuesday, November 30

2 Peter 1:12-21 *No prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.* (v.21)

In a way, anyone in the least observant and with a modicum of common sense could be a prophet. There is the matter of cause and effect. It is a fool who thinks we can go on breaking the laws of God and nature and get away with it. We worry about sin, of course, now and then. We know perfectly well that we should do something about it. Maybe later. We stifle the impulse to talk about it in certain company.

God's prophets can't stifle the impulse. There is a terrible urgency in them; they can't be still.

"Hear this!" Amos shouts. "Hear this!" We don't want to hear him. He is bad for business, he disturbs our contentment, makes shambles of our progress reports. When he speaks in church, he embarrasses everyone and is asked to leave. Someone notifies Washington about his subversive activities.

Amos is angry. "Aha!" we say very comfortably self-righteous, "you can't trust a man who is angry. He is out of control. Anger is a mortal sin." But as Dorothy Sayer has pointed out, there are two kinds of anger. Wrath is sinful for it is cruel, vindictive, and vengeful—it runs out of control, it desires destruction. But there is an anger that is focused, controlled. It is merciful. It purifies like fire destroying a place filled with disease. Amos doesn't gloat over the fate of the Israelites. His anger asks for amendment. He calls for repentance.

Amos 3:1-11; Psalms 5, 6; Matthew 21:12-22

Happy Birthday Ed Klumpp!

Wednesday, December 1

Amos 3:12—4:5 *"Hear this word, you cows of Bashan..."* (v.1a)

Amos called the privileged ladies of Israel "fat cows." It was not tactful, it was not kind, but it was true. Were the ladies of Israel always fat and rich? Were they once young wives of young husbands struggling to get started? The wives probably made their own clothes; family vacations were bike rides to the lake with peanut butter sandwiches and frisbees.

Then things looked up. There was a new house and now there is a bigger one with four cars for three people (absolute necessities!). Hamburger and macaroni casseroles and screw cap bottles of Chianti are no longer de rigueur for company meals. If his business is going to take the next step forward, the husband must close his eyes to the small shops and houses his developments blow away. Cutting back or even standing still are signs of a fool or a failure. We are duty bound to get ahead.

Slowly and subtly we are seduced into luxury. We get used to it, and our luxuries become our necessities. We use our "things" to define ourselves, to prove ourselves, even to prove love. We begin to call them "gifts of God,"

but all the time they are clogging the veins of our compassion, deforming justice, diverting our eyes from sunsets. We forget the freedom of simplicity; we no longer find wonder and grace in God's gifts of pelicans and peanut butter. Is it time for some honest self-examination?

Psalms 119:1-24; 2 Peter 3:1-10; Matthew 21:23-32

Thursday, December 2

Matthew 21:33-46 *"He will let out the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the fruits in their seasons."* (v.41)

We arrived at a one-room building that was a school, a storage shed, and this day a church in the mountains of Honduras. The people came. All their children were clean—glistening clean. (How can that be, I wondered, when they have to wash them in the rivers?) They had walked barefoot for miles over boulders and gullies. A man carried his old mother on his back; children brought their deformed brother in a cart.

The musicians were ready with a fiddle that had seen too many rainy seasons, a bass made from a box and three strands of rope, percussion supplied by two blocks of wood. *"Alabaré"* O, praise my Lord! A young woman who couldn't read held the bishop's Bible reverently. A dying baby was gently baptized. We shared the cup. Epiphany. Our Lord with us. *Alabaré*.

God brought Amos out of the back country to draw a decadent church into what has been called the greatest moment in Israel's history. Is he preparing another Amos today in the slums of Nairobi or the mountains of Honduras to take our comfortable church on its next journey?

Amos 4:6-13; Psalm 18:1-20; 2 Peter 3:11-18

Happy Anniversary Al & Kimbra Forkhamer!

Friday, December 3

Matthew 22:1-14 *"Friend, how did you get here without a wedding garment?"* (v.12)

The story of the wedding guest who was cast into outer darkness is stern stuff. He had seen a good thing, and when he was invited he pushed into the feast rubbing his hands and looking for the best company. No need to change his clothes. The host was a friendly type, not fussy about the guest list. But before he knew it, that guest was out in the cold.

I have never seen a picture of a stern Jesus, and yet, at times, he was. The Bible tells us so—in several places. There were times when people were distinctly uncomfortable in his presence. We know that he was kind, merciful, profoundly understanding, approachable, generous. We want to press it further. We want him to be lenient, permissive, benign, indulgent. We ask him to make compromises.

But is there a bottom line for those of us who call ourselves Christians? Do we just throw on our wedding garments over our old sins and take

them into the church, into the coffee hour? Do we use the church for our own purposes, or do we let our Lord use us for his?

There is a bottom line, a place where we will meet his stern regard and hear his rebuke.

Amos 5:1-17; Psalms 16, 17; Jude 1-16

Saturday, December 4

Amos 5:18-27 *"I take no delight in your solemn assemblies...but let justice roll down like waters."* (vv.21, 24)

We come to church faithfully and often. We honor our pledge. We join prayer groups and study the Bible. We make some sacrifices to contribute regularly to charity. We go on retreats, on pilgrimages to the Holy Land, we do our private devotions on our knees.

Does it change us at all? Does it turn us upside down and shake out our meanness? Does it pull us up short and show us what we are doing amiss? Does the world think we are peculiar? Does it make us fools for God?

Our lessons this week have been filled with tough love. Whereas Scripture encourages and enlightens us, it also challenges and convicts. For our spiritual health's sake, it does not allow us comfort and complacency. God wants more from us than lives filled with self-interest leading to self-destruction. God loves us just as we are, but He likes us too much to let us stay that way. And that is Good News.

Psalms 20, 21; Jude 17-25; Matthew 22:15-22

Happy Anniversary Peter & Paula Conover!

by Lydia Dorsett

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