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Proper 27 • Amos 5:18–24 • November 9, 2014

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Homiletical Helps on LSB Series A—First Lesson to Series B—Epistles

Proper 27 • Amos 5:18–24 • November 9, 2014

The words of the first writing prophet, Amos, come to us only five times in the three-year lectionary, and only once during the Series A year in this pericope. It is paired with important New Testament eschatological readings of 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18 (a frequent funeral sermon text) and Matthew 25:1–13 (the parable of the Ten Virgins) which also appear only once each in the lectionary. Some pastors may have used Reed Lessing’s Lenten series *Restore the Roar*, which will have taken their hearers through Amos wonderfully well. If that series wasn’t used, the pastor could import some of those ideas into this sermon. Lessing’s Amos commentary should also be consulted if one is considering preaching on this text, as it will give much more detail than this short Homiletical Help can provide.¹ Lessing begins his commentary with C. S. Lewis’s wonderful conversation in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* between the children and the beavers about Aslan the Lion which concludes with “Course he isn’t safe. But he’s good.” We too often want a tame, safe God when in reality, thankfully, we have an awe-inspiring, grace-filled God.

At the time of Amos, the people of the northern kingdom (Israel) had been on the path of apostasy and syncretism for nearly two hundred years, and had been led away from faithful worship in Jerusalem. About a dozen unfaithful kings had led them away—the latest a new Jeroboam. Elijah and Elisha had preached God’s words of warning to Israel a few generations earlier. Now Yahweh calls Amos, a shepherd from Tekoa in southern Judah, to the task. He does not hold back, and echoes of Amos can be heard through the rest of the writing prophets. Through Amos, Yahweh roars judgment to the neighboring kingdoms around Judah and Israel. The theme of a lion and roaring occurs frequently in Amos (1:2; 3:4, 8, 12; 5:19). Starting at 2:6, Amos has the strongest warnings for Israel, warnings about their false worship and the mistreatment of the poor by the rich (e.g., 2:6–7; 4:1; 5:11–12). This pericope is amid these many warnings.

The Lord has tried less catastrophic methods to call Israel to repentance, like withholding rain from some but not others, sending plagues, etc., “but yet you did not return to me, declares the Lord” (4:6–11). Now Yahweh warns this generation that the end is near (and the end actually does come about forty years later, with the Assyrian invasion of 722 BC). The people are told that they will not get what they are expecting. They believe that if they mimic true worship through various feasts, grain offerings, and burnt offerings, that God will be pleased and continue to bless them. But the songs of their worship will not be heard. They are also worshipping other deities of Mesopotamia (5:26); they will be taken into exile into their realms. They cannot escape. God wants them to continue receiving his grace, but they won’t have it.

Preaching this text will have its challenges. The pastor will not want to simply equate today’s listeners with ancient Israel’s idol worshippers, but will know the syncretistic tendencies of his own locale (e.g., lodges or the belief that Jesus is not the only

way to God). He will recognize that we all have a tendency to want a tame, safe, comfortable God. We do need constant reminders that this gracious, loving God is awe-inspiring and to be feared when we stray. If the pastor uses this pericope as the main text, the gospel will need to be imported from elsewhere. In his commentary, Lessing points out that the darkness of the day of judgment connects to not only 722 and 587 BC, or AD 70, but to the three hours of darkness on Good Friday. He then uses Mark 15:33, John 19:30, and Revelation 21:23–25 to bring us to “the promise of unending day.”² The eschatology of 1 Thessalonians 4:13–17 could also be used, tying the roar of the lion to the cry of command, the voice of the archangel (v.16), which will announce the glorious resurrection of the dead.

Possible opening (modify to your circumstance): I have a nephew who was a brave, rambunctious preschooler. We visited the zoo together once. We came upon the lion enclosure, which had a floor-to-ceiling window of thick glass. The king of the pride was lying majestically just beyond the glass. My nephew, knowing the lion could not possibly get through the thick window, began dancing in front of the king, just on the cusp of teasing him. After a few seconds, the king was displeased; he roared and took a swipe at my nephew. My nephew slowly backed away from the window, eyes wide and mouth agape, awed by the teeth, claws, and roar of the king. He was a different little boy for the rest of our day at the zoo.

Rick Marrs

Endnotes

¹ R. Reed Lessing, *Amos Concordia Commentary* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009).

² *Ibid.* 1352
<http://scholar.csl.edu/cj/vol40/iss4/6>