

Proper 23 B—October 11, 2009  
Church of the Reformation--Lutheran, Affton, MO  
Text: Amos 5:6-7, 10-15

### Seek and Live

The first Monday of October is always the opening day of the new session of the Supreme Court of the United States. This year a new justice was seated and then the court decided which of the thousands of cases before them they would hear. Some will be disappointed when a decision is made, others will rejoice that justice has finally been served.

The same reactions will be repeated throughout the courtrooms of our nation, state, and cities.

There are cases where we wonder if justice will ever be served. An alleged murder out on bail then commits another murder. A drunk driver kills a newly married couple—and this is not the first time the drunk driver has injured or killed someone. This is called justice?

You don't that much about corrupt judges, except when cable-news outraces newspapers to break the news. Still, the question remains: *Can we get justice in our day?*

That was also the question of the day at the time of Amos the prophet. The court system of the day was ripe with problems. Honesty was not as necessary for justice as was a pile of cash.

Those who looked for honesty, those who spoke the truth, those who lacked the money needed for the bribe always came out on the short end of things.

Perverved justice infected not only courtrooms but all of society of the Northern Kingdom. The poor who could not buy their way out became a commodity to be bought and sold in slavery,

trampled under foot like a scrap of paper. Money tainted by blood and bribery purchased the **“stone mansions”** and **“lush vineyards”** in the Israelite suburbs, far away from the ghettos of the poor. Justice and society were so twisted by corruption as to silence the mouths of the prudent—those who were aware of the present evil.

To this perverted, evil-ridden society came Amos, a farmer from Tekoa in the southern Bible belt. Through Amos came the Word of the Lord: **“Seek the Lord and live.”** God knew the greatness of their sin. He knew this people He had chosen. He knew this people He had protected during the exodus. He knew this people who continually failed to honor and obey Him. God knew their mini-worship marts of idolatry set up in Bethel, Gilgal, Beersheba, and elsewhere. The Lord knew the fragile, shiny façade that covered His people corroded and rotting in sin. He knew the judgment their sin would bring upon them.

Thus His Word: **“Seek the Lord and live.”** Turn, repent, seek the Lord who had saved them time and again before. Seek the Lord where He had promised He would be found—not in Bethel, Gilgal, or Beersheba—but where He revealed Himself in His Word, in His promises. **“Seek good, not evil, that you may live.”** To live meant life in the presence of God—hating evil, loving and doing good, living a life of repentance, a turning away from sin. Only with sin removed, only with sin’s separation bridged, would God be with them.

Because Amos knew the greatness of the people’s sin, he could utter God’s promise only as a “perhaps”—**“perhaps the Lord God Almighty will have mercy on the remnant of Joseph.”** But this is the Lord, who described Himself in Exodus (34:6-7) as **“the compassionate God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and**

**forgiving wickedness, rebellion, and sin.”** The Lord, indeed, was gracious to the remnant of Israel in spite of the necessary destruction of the whole nation because of its rejection of the call to repentance issued by Amos and his fellow-prophets.

From God’s side of the promise, though, the promise is sure. It was fulfilled when the judicial system of Herod, Pilate, and the chief priests was used by God to deal with all sin. No cash to bribe the judge; only the sentence of death and the blood flowing from the cross to cover all enslaved by sin, blood flowing from the veins of **“the Lord God Almighty [who is with us]”**, Immanuel.

Gone is Tekoa farmer and second-career prophet Amos. And how are things today? Few, if any, of us are involved with the judicial system; few, if any, have taken a bribe, or denied the rights of the poor in a court of law. Yet we have no problem judging others. While wealth and possessions may not pose a problem for most us, there are times when we take advantage of others, even the poor. We may be indignant over the Israel of Jeroboam’s day and even claim how different we are—yet from our hearts as from theirs **“come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander”** (Matthew 15:19). Our sin, too, separates us from God. He knows **“the pain we put each other through.”** He knows **“how many are [our] offenses and how great [our] sins.”**

That is why the blood shed by Christ on Calvary’s cross flows to you and flows over you, covering and forgiving your sin. Daily to us comes the word: **“Seek the Lord and live”**—seek Him where He has promised to be found—in His Word, in His sacraments. **“Seek the Lord and live”**—live in the presence of God—hating evil, loving and doing good, living a life of

repentance, a turning away from sin. Only because God has already found us and made us His own, can we seek the Lord and live this day and always under His mercy.

Henry V. Gerike