

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after the Epiphany  
January 17, 2010  
Amos 9:11-15

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*11 "In that day I will raise up  
the booth of David that is fallen  
and repair its breaches,  
and raise up its ruins  
and rebuild it as in the days of old,  
12 that they may possess the remnant of Edom  
and all the nations who are called by my name,"  
declares the LORD who does this.  
13 "Behold, the days are coming," declares the LORD,  
"when the plowman shall overtake the reaper  
and the treader of grapes him who sows the seed;  
the mountains shall drip sweet wine,  
and all the hills shall flow with it.  
14 I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel,  
and they shall rebuild the ruined cities and inhabit them;  
they shall plant vineyards and drink their wine,  
and they shall make gardens and eat their fruit.  
15 I will plant them on their land,  
and they shall never again be uprooted  
out of the land that I have given them,"  
says the LORD your God.*

In some cases, I think, a picture, rather than words, might be a more appropriate medium for a sermon. Sometimes a well-crafted image can bring together ideas in a simple, yet profound way, that prose (or even poetry) cannot.

Today might just be one of those times.

Consider a few of the themes that converge on this 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of the Epiphany Season:

- The Light of Christ, penetrating the darkness of unbelief, and bringing the light of God's saving grace to those who do not know Him
- Amos' Old Testament prophecy of a Savior who would rescue God's people, and rebuild His Kingdom as in the days of old
- This Mission Sunday and a joyful reunion today with Pastor Olav Panchu, from our sister church in Saratov, Russia

*"In that day I will raise up the booth of David that is fallen and repair its breaches, and raise up its ruins and rebuild it as in the days of old."*

Amos lived and prophesied from around 790 to 740BC in the days of the prophet Isaiah. He spoke God's Word to both the north and the south in the divided Kingdom of Israel, some 200 years after the glory days of King David. The message of Amos is recorded in the short book that bears his name... nine chapters long... eight of which are filled with warnings and prophecies of

judgment for the people of God, because of their sins... judgment and destruction that would come at the hands of the surrounding nations. But then, in the 9<sup>th</sup> and final chapter, come the words of today's Old Testament reading—God's promise of hope and eventual deliverance for His people. These words are pure Gospel promise. But it's important to understand that these five verses come only after eight long chapters of severe judgment and suffering.

Those final words of Amos begin:

*"In that day I will raise up the booth of David that is fallen and repair its breaches, and raise up its ruins and rebuild it as in the days of old."*

If we were creating an image or painting a picture for today's sermon, imagine now superimposing the following thoughts over the picture of Amos' words. And consider first his phrase, *"as in the days of old"*.

You and I, as Americans, live in the context of almost 400 years of history since the Pilgrims arrived at Plymouth Rock. And somehow we North American Christians seem prone to speak in paternalistic ways, as if we who have "always" had God's Word and saving faith (it seems to some) will always have it, and will always be in a position of sharing it with the Gentile heathen, who don't have God's Word and Gospel.

But consider this as today we celebrate our partnership with the Church in Russia:

The Christian faith was dominant in Russia for over 600 years  
before the Pilgrims ever set foot on Plymouth Rock!

Already in the year 950AD—over a thousand years ago—Queen Olga of Kiev visited the great Christian center of Byzantium (in modern day Turkey), and embraced the Christian faith, and took it back with her to her motherland. Then, a few decades later, her grandson Prince Vladimir embraced the Christian faith and was baptized in 988AD. Listen to this brief account of that time by one named Nestor:

"After his return to Kiev, Vladimir caused his twelve sons to be baptized, and proceeded to destroy the monuments of heathenism... At his call, all the multitude of the citizens, in groups, with their wives and children, flocked to the Dnieper River; and without any objection received Holy Baptism, as a nation, from the Greek bishops and priests... Some stood in water up to their necks, others up to their breasts, holding their young children in their arms; the priests read the prayers from the shore, naming at once whole groups of people by the same name."

This date of 988AD is celebrated as the official beginning of Christianity in Russia; and in 1988 (my last year of seminary) there were major celebrations, throughout the Christian Church, for 1,000 years of Christianity in Russia!

Fast forward now almost 800 years, from the baptism of Vladimir, to 1763, when Empress Catherine II (or Catherine "the Great") of Russia invited thousands of Christians from Germany to join the millions of Christians in Russia, and settle on the Volga River, around Saratov, for various economic and political reasons. (In our own congregation we have numerous descendants of these Germans from Russia, who then came to Kansas in the 1800's.)

Consider these facts, specifically about Lutheran Christians in Russia 100 years ago. There were over 3 ½ million Lutherans in 1,800 congregations throughout Russia. They had come from Latvia, Estonia, Germany, Finland, Lithuania, Poland, Armenia, and various other countries. Among Lutherans of Finnish descent, around the city of St. Petersburg, there were 300 Lutheran elementary schools, one Lutheran high school, and a Lutheran teacher training academy. The one million German Lutherans in Russia included over 100,000 of those who had come at the invitation of Catherine the Great, and lived near the city of Saratov, in 300 villages. And of those 100,000 at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, some 16,000 were members of St. Mary Lutheran Church in Saratov—the third largest Lutheran congregation in all of Russia.

And then came the Bolshevik revolution of 1917, and severe efforts to extinguish the light of Christ. Two years later, by 1919, the government began to destroy church buildings. By 1929, all churches in Russia were closed by order of the government. For decades, it was a very dark time for the people and for the spread of the Gospel.

Then, in 1956 one Lutheran Church was allowed to reopen in Kazakhstan. In 1965, two congregations were allowed to begin in Siberia. Between 1970 and 1977 three Ingrian Lutheran churches (i.e. Finnish Lutheran) began to reopen. Then, as recently as September 14, 1992—just 17 years ago!—the Russian government granted recognition again to the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ingria in Russia (in which Pastor Panchu is a pastor and vice president). In this Lutheran church body there are 90 congregations, 80 pastors, many deacons, and perhaps some 20,000 baptized Christians.

*“In that day I will raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen and repair its breaches, and raise up its ruins and rebuild it as in the days of old.”*

Now, onto this picture, overlay this image of Amos’ prophecy.

We have heard about the background of Amos’ message of Law in the first eight chapters of his prophecy. It was a warning to the people of God to turn from their sins, lest the Lord punish them.

But then in that beautiful 9<sup>th</sup> chapter comes God’s Gospel promise—His promise of hope and deliverance, not only politically and nationally, but most importantly His promise of spiritual deliverance through the Savior Jesus Christ, the descendant of David.

Simply put, “that day” of which Amos speaks, when he says *“In that day I will raise up the tabernacle of David,”* is the day of God’s deliverance that began with the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ for the sins of the world. The fallen “booth (tabernacle, tent) of David” was restored by the Son of David, Jesus Christ who “tabernacled” among us, first in the womb of Mary, and then as He lived and ministered among us on this earth. God’s message of hope, for His Old Testament people, in the face of temporal misery and the wages of sin was much more than a message of temporal hope only. Rather, it was ultimately centered in the forgiveness of sins and restoration to life that would come through the Savior, Jesus Christ. Thus it is that the entire Gospel message of Amos looks far forward to the day of Jesus Christ.

But here’s the really wonderful thing: That great “day” of the Lord didn’t end when Jesus’ time on earth ended. Rather, that was just the beginning. For that great day of the Lord continues

today. It is the time of the Church during which God's kingdom continually comes among us through the ministry of His Word and Sacrament. And you and I are blessed to be part of "that day" as the Gospel and saving work of Christ continues to go forth into the world and come to us anew each day.

This understanding of Amos' prophecy—to be speaking of both Christ and the Church, and to be looking forward to a "day" that began with Christ's ministry and continues without end—is confirmed, in the book of Acts, chapter 15, where the apostle James quotes this prophecy of Amos to apply to the Gentile mission that Paul and Barnabus were undertaking! James cites the words of Amos this way:

*"After this I will return,  
and I will rebuild the tent of David that has fallen;  
I will rebuild its ruins,  
and I will restore it,  
that the remnant of mankind may seek the Lord,  
and all the Gentiles who are called by my name,  
says the Lord, who makes these things". Acts 15:16-17*

Do you see?!? God's Gospel message through Amos was fulfilled—not just when the deported people of Judah were allowed to return from captivity in Babylon. But God's Gospel message was fulfilled in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ! And it continued to be fulfilled as the Light of Christ—the forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ—was preached to the Gentiles in the book of Acts. And this great day of the Lord continued to be fulfilled in Russia in 988AD as thousands of Gentiles became Christians... and in 1620 as the Gospel came to Plymouth Rock... and in 1763 as new waves of German Christian immigrants received God's gifts of Word and Sacrament on the banks of the Volga River.

And now, after decades of terrible oppression that began in 1917, that great day of the Lord of which Amos spoke continues today, as God is raising up in Russia the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and repairing its breaches, and raising up its ruins, and rebuilding it as in the days of old!

**THIS PROPHECY OF AMOS IS BEING FULFILLED EVEN TODAY, IN RUSSIA AND WHEREVER THE LIGHT OF THE GOSPEL IS OVERCOMING THE DARKNESS OF UNBELIEF AND EVERYTHING THAT WOULD SEEK TO RESTRAIN IT!**

Dear friends in Christ, what a blessing it is that you and I have been made a part of God's kingdom through Holy Baptism... that we have the privilege of joining each week in Cana's feast to receive there the forgiveness of sins that Christ gives through His blood of the new covenant. As we have been so blessed, let us be eager to support the continued coming of the tabernacle of David, so that many more Gentiles who are called by God's name may enter. As St. Paul said in today's Epistle:

*"Having gifts that differ according to the grace given us, let us use them... If the gift is to contribute, let us do so in generosity... Contribute to the needs of the saints..." (Rom. 12)*