



Readings, Reflection & Prayers

The sixth Sunday after Trinity

11 July 2021



StJohnsAL5

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Readings for this Sunday

These are the readings for this Sunday which you may like to read in your bibles at home.

Amos 7:7-15

Ephesians 1:3-14

Mark 6:14-29

Amos 7: 7-15:

This is what he showed me: the Lord was standing beside a wall built with a plumb-line, with a plumb-line in his hand. And the LORD said to me, 'Amos, what do you see?' And I said, 'A plumb-line.' Then the Lord said,

'See, I am setting a plumb-line
in the midst of my people Israel;
I will never again pass them by;
the high places of Isaac shall be made desolate,
and the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid waste,
and I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword.'

Amaziah Complains to the King

Then Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, sent to King Jeroboam of Israel, saying, 'Amos has conspired against you in the very centre of the house of Israel; the land is not able to bear all his words. For thus Amos has said,

"Jeroboam shall die by the sword,
and Israel must go into exile
away from his land."

And Amaziah said to Amos, 'O seer, go, flee away to the land of Judah, earn your bread there, and prophesy there; but never again prophesy at Bethel, for it is the king's sanctuary, and it is a temple of the kingdom.'

Then Amos answered Amaziah, 'I am no prophet, nor a prophet's son; but I am a herdsman, and a dresser of sycomore trees, and the LORD took me from following the flock, and the LORD said to me, "Go, prophesy to my people Israel."

Ephesians 1: 3-14:

Spiritual Blessings in Christ

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; this is the pledge of our inheritance towards redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory.

Reflection from Anne Edwards

What do we do when we want or need someone's attention? If we're a fair distance apart, we might wave at them – but they have to be looking in our direction to notice. If we're closer, we might call out to them – but they have to hear our voice against all other voices clamouring for their attention.

When he was quite little, my son discovered that if calling “Daddy, Daddy” wasn’t working, he’d call “Alan” – and it invariably got his father’s attention. If his father was in ‘work mode’, then he wasn’t listening in ‘parent mode’. For us to hear God’s calling, we have to be in the right mode as God’s children – and if we’re not listening out for Him, then we might not hear him.

Hearing God? A daring idea, some would say – presumptuous and even dangerous. “But what if we’re made for it?” writes Dallard Willard in the preface to his book “Hearing God: Building an Intimate relationship with the Creator”. He goes on: “What if the human system simply will not function properly without it?”

Our readings today tell us about the benefits of hearing His calling, and also what the outworking of this means in our lives. And it’s quite a mixed bag.

First Amos: a man called by God, faithfully living out his calling, but being thrown out of town by the professionals who didn’t like what they were hearing.

Paul writes to the Ephesians that they’re blessed, chosen, destined and sealed with the promised Spirit of God.

And in Mark we discover something of the harsh reality of the working out of God’s calling in the midst of personal relationships and political realities. These three readings juxtapose elements of the Christian life that we struggle to reconcile every day.

Amos was a simple shepherd who doesn’t appear to have had a sudden vision of the majesty of YHWH, but rather the sheer logic of events that seized him and compelled him to think. And, having thought, he wasn’t afraid to speak. The people didn’t like what they heard, and they didn’t want to listen.

In spite of the fact that he was amongst God’s people and responding to what the Lord God showed him, Amos was regarded as a troublemaker and banished to his village. But banishing Amos isn’t going to make any difference to God’s justice – heaven’s justice is unswerving. Nothing can prevent the collapse of a civilization that violates divine laws – it will happen in God’s time. What he saw was all there for everyone else to see, as it is

for us today. For Amos the sequence of cause and effect applied to the whole of life: sow evil and reap destruction, whether you be man/woman or nation.

Then we jump into Ephesians – what a contrast: blessed, chosen, destined and sealed with the promised Spirit of God. Here Paul writes of the inheritance within which every Christian stands – and, as well as this, we have the privilege of knowing God’s plan: “A plan for the fullness of time, to gather all things to Himself, things in heaven and things on earth”. It’s not for us to pick and choose – but to fulfil our calling where we are – whether it’s in the family, at work, within our personal lives and our life in community, whether it’s in our dealings with individuals or institutions, with the least significant or those of influence and power.

You are chosen, your destiny is marked out for you, signified by the promised Holy Spirit. How does that make you feel: Do you feel strengthened, privileged, comfortable and secure? What difference does it make to your daily living?

And then there is the horror story from Mark. Matthew tells us about Jesus and John the Baptist and the mess of personal relationships and political realities in which their calling is worked out. And from Luke we learn a lot about Herod Antipas who features largely in the life and death of both John and Jesus.

Herod Antipas heard of “it”. What was this “it”? Last week’s reading in Mark’s Gospel told us that following his rejection at Nazareth, Jesus went about the villages teaching. He called the twelve and sent them out two by two, where they proclaimed that all should repent, they cast out many demons and healed many who were sick. This was the “it” Herod heard about and he was convinced Jesus was John the Baptist raised from the dead. Then, in parenthesis, we get the horror story: the woman with a grudge, the man afraid of losing face, and the end result: John’s head on a platter – both John and Jesus fulfilling God’s calling.

We become who we are as Christians by relating to God and to others. We can’t be Christians in isolation; as Paul put it, we’re part of the Body of Christ. Today our calling is to learn to see the world as God does and to

listen to what He has to say rather than to the lies around us, to value our relationship with Him above everything else.

As Christians, we have to prove our worth, not sit on the sidelines. Our calling, whoever we are, is to communicate the good news of Jesus, of God's saving love – that's not always an easy thing to do as others don't always want to hear it. It means being alert to the changes going on around us and deciding if we really want to follow the values of our society today – or would we rather it, and we, woke up to the realities of where these values are leading, have already led? Here at St John's we are grateful for our Eco Church Group who have been and are listening to the prophets calling us to change our ways of living. When we break an appliance, we need the manufacturer's help to fix it. We have broken this beautiful world, and we need God's grace and mercy to help us find solutions to heal it.

Christianity is not, at its heart, about living a decent and moral life. It is about living the life we were created for, in tune with the God who made us and loves us, and because we believe that Jesus is the Son of God, who came to show us in the flesh just how great that love is. We are designed to be part of the ceaseless flow of love between Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And there are many passages, especially in the Old Testament, telling us that we have to be on our knees and repent of the ways we have been living, and then change course from the profligacy and greed that have brought about the pollution of air, water and land. July is Plastic Free month – can you sign up to Plastic Free July? There will be plenty of tips on how to cut back, cut out the use of this now recognised as 'indestructible' product.

Archbishop William Temple is reported as having replied to a woman who complimented him on his sermon with the rather disconcerting question: "So what are you going to do about it?" May be this is a question we should all ask ourselves Sunday by Sunday as we leave St John's having listened to the sermon of the day.

Prayers

Collect for this Sunday

Merciful God,
you have prepared for those who love you
such good things as pass our understanding:
pour into our hearts such love towards you
that we, loving you in all things and above all things,
may obtain your promises,
which exceed all that we can desire,
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

Heavenly Father,

We thank you for today's prophets, from Greta Thunberg to David Attenborough and Prince Charles. Our hope rests in you, but we must listen to your voice. Help us to repent of our ways, and make the changes in our lives – to turn away from all that has spoiled your creation – that we may refresh our vision of your intention that we should care for and steward this beautiful creation of yours. May we tread lightly on your earth, leaving only a shallow footprint.

Amen.

Heavenly Father,

We pray that you would give us listening ears, teachable spirits and willing obedience that we may learn new ways of daily living. Your apostle Paul reminds us that we so often do what we don't want to do, and don't do what we want to do. We implore you by the power of your Holy Spirit to strengthen our wills to do all we can to seek your kingdom, rather than build up treasures on earth, as we renew our relationship with you, our God.

Amen

Why not read Psalm 104 and turn it into your own prayer as you celebrate God's wonderful world during this week.

Parish Prayers for the week ahead

In the Anglican Cycle of Prayer:

Sunday	The Episcopal Church in the Philippines
Monday	The Diocese of Cuernavaca – The Anglican Church of Mexico
Tuesday	The Diocese of Cuttack – The (united) Church of North India
Wednesday	The Diocese of Cyangugu – The Anglican Church of Rwanda
Thursday	The Diocese of Cyprus and the Gulf – The Episcopal Church in Jerusalem & The Middle East
Friday	The Diocese of Daejeon – The Anglican Church of Korea
Saturday	The Diocese of North Dakota – The Episcopal Church

In our Diocesan Cycle of Prayer:

Sunday	Parish of Kings Langley (Deanery of Hemel Hempstead)
Monday	Parish of Leverstock Green (Deanery of Hemel Hempstead)
Tuesday	Parish of Aston (Conventional District) (Deanery of Hertford and Ware)
Wednesday	Parish of Bayford (Deanery of Hertford and Ware)
Thursday	Parish of Bengeo, Holy Trinity and St Leonard with Christ Church (Deanery of Hertford and Ware)
Friday	Parish of Bramfield (Deanery of Hertford and Ware)
Saturday	Parish of Essendon (Deanery of Hertford and Ware)

For the homes and families in:

Sunday	Churchfield, Coleswood Road
Monday	Collens Road, Cosne Mews
Tuesday	Crabtree Lane, Cranbourne Drive
Wednesday	Cravells Road, Croftwell
Thursday	Cross Lane, Dark Lane
Friday	The Deerings, Dellcroft Way
Saturday	Dickinsons Field, East Common

The Sick:

Claire, Sue, Christine, Hermione, Karen, Chris, Emma and all whose names are entered on our St Luke's Cell Prayer List.

On their year's mind:

Philip Jones, Gina Clapham, Louise Gorey, Mavis Treacher, June Jones, Joy Stares,

Church Opening times

Other services / in Church congregation

- Evening Prayer on Wednesdays at 5.00pm
- Sunday 9.30am Parish Eucharist
- Short family service next Sunday 18 July at 4.00pm
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Private Prayer

- Saturday opening (in addition to Sunday), 11.00am – 4.00pm

A reminder... of this phone service:

Daily Hope – dial 0800 804 8044 for prayer, reflection, music and worship services from the Church of England. A weekly service is available from 9 am every Sunday.

Church at home:

We are delighted to produce each week these printed papers. If you would prefer not to receive these papers each week, please let Julie in the parish office know. If you are aware of others in the parish who would also value the opportunity to worship at home in this way, do please contact a member of the Ministry team or Julie (Parish Office Tel: 01582 712776).