

Jesse Perkins
7-10-2022
Year C Proper 10

Amos 7:7-17
Luke 10:25-37

“Spiritual Vertigo”

- Do you ever get motion sick?
 - Boy, I do. I think I have mentioned it before.
 - And I get it easily, quickly, and sometimes unexpectedly
 - Cars, boats, roller coasters- heck I can get dizzy sitting still if I see too much motion, like in a IMAX theater
 - Sadly, my younger son seems to have inherited this trait,
 - Which as it turns out, is possibly an evolutionary advantage that protects against poisoning¹
 - Yes, seems that by getting dizzy and vomiting can marginally help chances of survival, by getting the poison up and out of your system
 - Before it can cause too much damage to your stomach
 - Basically, any time the movement I see with my eyes, and the movement I feel with my inner ear do not match up,
 - I get dizzy and then sick
 - Sadly, in my modern life, there is a much greater chance of riding in a car than being poisoned!
 - But try and tell that to my 1000s of years of genetic evolution- they don't care
 - Over the counter meds work some, prescription patches work great but with side effects
 - So I just drive all the time, while Katy and Gaius enjoy the ride in the back of the van
 - Not too long ago, I saw advertised on Facebook - so you know it's medically sound and proven scientifically! -
 - A special pair of glasses that were supposed to prevent motion sickness
 - And I bought a couple pair
 - Notice the rings around the eyes with liquid in them, and the idea was that your eyes could take cues from the liquid

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Motion_sickness#Defense_against_poisoning

- And always know how much you were moving, or not moving
- That somehow they would set the brain to bring together both your vision and your sense of motion in the inner ear
- Truly, I was willing to try anything, and look very silly, for the chance that I could ride in the backseat of a car and read a book
- And my advice: do not waste your money. And do not believe everything you read on the internet.
- They work as good as they look, which is to say not at all
- Now days, what I do when I feel it coming on, is to look out in the distance and try to find a point on the horizon that is not moving
- A cloud, a mountain, a far away building- something big, and not moving, that can provide me a sort of anchor of stability
- A lack of motion, so calm my nervous system down a bit
- And I think today, that maybe I could call that a plumb line of sorts
- A guide that always points in the right direction, that does not move around erratically and dizzyingly- keeps you steady, level and straight
- Our spiritual plumb line: the fundamental principals to guide us, orient us,
 - And keep us level when everything is moving around us.
 - And that work a lot better than these glasses
- We get our imagery of the plumb line this morning from Amos, one of the minor prophets
 - He is writing around the year 750 BCE, and during a relative time of peace and prosperity
 - And while everything seems to be going well, Amos calls out the injustice under that shroud of prosperity
 - The neglect of God's laws, Israel moving away from the people God wanted them to be, the rise in wealth inequality
 - And he focuses on God's justice, omnipotence, and judgment
 - I learned a lot about this plumb line, and its use by the prophet- maybe I shared this with you in a past sermon, but it's so cool
 - "Plumb line" turns out to be an incorrect translation- that is not what the ancient Hebrew says.
 - That word, אָנָה ('ānāk) , certainly does not mean plumb line
 - So why does our version of the bible contain a known mistranslation without so much as a footnote?
 - The truth is, we still are not sure what it is that Amos is talking about, we are not sure what this word means
 - This is the only appearance of this word in the Bible

- I stumbled upon this incredible site, thetorah.com, that was speculating how the words might have been pronounced in upper and lower Judah
- And how Amos was most likely making a pun here, having a little fun with dialects and word meanings...
- The meaning of the word itself was closer to the metal “tin”
 - Or some other pure metal that God had used to construct a wall perfectly and with pure materials
 - Something that gleams brightly
- Turns out that it was during the medieval ages, some scholars translated it as plumb line in an attempt to make sense of the passage
 - And it just stuck, and we don’t have anything better
- Modern scholarship keeps plumb line, and perhaps suggests that the original, lost meaning of the word involved a play on words that only ancient Israelites would understand
- While we may miss out on original sentiment expressed here in by Amos in ancient Hebrew
- We get the meaning:
 - Amos is telling us about God’s kingdom, and God’s deepest desire for us and how God created things to be
 - Our stewardship of God’s creation and fellow people, judgment for what we do with it,
 - And what our guiding principle should be
- Almost as an answer to the question presented in Amos, Jesus tells us the story of the Good Samaritan
 - And what has become the primary guide post, the plumb line, the fixed point on the horizon, for those who follow him
 - Jesus tells this parable in response to a question from a lawyer, or a legal expert
 - One commentator pointed out that unlike some situations in Luke, there is little context for this conversation
 - Jesus is not traveling, no crowd of people around him- this isn’t a Pharisee
 - This commentator suggested that this lawyer might have been traveling with Jesus and his disciples,
 - It might have been a friendly question from one of Jesus’ followers as they sat around the table together and learned
 - The lawyer addresses Jesus as “teacher”, and asks, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?”
 - It is a question I bet most of those gathered around wanted to know
 - This lawyer would have been well versed in both religious and civil law

- Indeed there was little difference at the time
- And when Jesus in turn asks him what is written in the law, he is the legal expert after all, he gives a fantastic answer
- Love God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind
 - And your neighbor as yourself
- The first part comes straight from Deuteronomy 6:5 and was part of the Shema, serving as a centerpiece for daily Jewish prayer
- The second part of his answer comes from Leviticus 19:18: love your neighbor as yourself
- We would expect nothing less from an expert in the law
- But he wanted something more- he wanted Jesus to assure him he was doing it all right, was he passing the test
- Who is my neighbor?
- Who did he have to love in order to love God
- It was a reasonable question for this lawyer: he had spent his entire life studying what the law required and what it forbade
- The law was legalistic, clearly defined
- But this man knew the loop holes, and what he had to do to pass the test
- He wants to know what he has to do exactly to be justified and to inherit eternal life
- So Jesus answers with the story of a man beaten and left for dead on the road.
- Of course we know the story:
 - A man is beaten, robbed, and left for dead on the side of a road.
 - This would have been no surprise, as they were also constantly hearing of the dangers along this road in particular
 - In the time of Jesus, the road from Jerusalem to Jericho was notorious for its danger and difficulty,
 - It was even known as the "Way of Blood" because "of the blood which is often shed there by robbers".²
 - A Priest and the Levite pass by on the other side ignoring the man
 - Some commentators say that they were afraid of ritual defilement, and only trying to keep the law as they saw it
 - Fulfilling the law's every iota
 - But that was kind of the problem: keeping the law had gotten in the way of loving the people.

² Wilkinson, "The Way from Jerusalem to Jericho" The Biblical Archaeologist, Vol. 38, No. 1 (Mar., 1975), pp. 10–24, retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parable_of_the_Good_Samaritan

- It was a talking point of Jesus many times in the Gospel, how religion had gotten in the way of what was most important
- And finally a Samaritan, of all people, stops and helps.
- There was significant racism between these two peoples:
- Simply calling a Samaritan “good” would have been counter-cultural to the Jews
- The amount of hatred and distrust that this one good Samaritan overcame in order to help is amazing
- Jews would often go miles out of their way to avoid going through Samaria³, and the feeling was mutual
- Perhaps this truth, just as much as the admonishment to help each other, might be the true take away for us this morning
- It requires a change in being, a change in the heart, one that does not focus on doing just enough to keep the law
- But one that results in a different approach to life all together, a change of being instead of just doing the right thing.
- One that instead of asking who is my neighbor, who is it that I must love in order to be saved,
- We start asking, how it is that I can become a more neighborly person, a person who loves more?
- It is not about who “they” are, it is about who we are.
- What guides us.
- What guides you this morning?
 - What keeps you from getting spiritual vertigo with everything that is happening in the world around us?
 - Perhaps it is family, travel, entertainment, massages- all good things to calm us down and re-center
 - But what guides our beliefs, positions, opinions, and especially the way we interact with others?
 - There are many types of inferior plumb lines out there- things that are no better than those glasses in the end
 - Poor substitutes for love
 - That’s what so powerful about the Good Samaritan parable- it shows so many alternate things that can guide and drive us that are not love
 - It shows how duty can get in the way of love
 - It shows how certainty can get in the way of love
 - Of how even self-preservation can get in the way of love
 - Of how prejudice can wiggle in there and get in the way of our love

³ <https://www.pulpitfiction.com/notes/proper10c>

- Maybe even apathy, numbness, and disinterest
- All of that was there in the two religious leaders who walked by, probably believing they were in the right
- But when held up to the plumb line of what was love to that injured person?
 - None measured up
- But one let love guide them, over all that other stuff
-
- I would say that this is definitely a journey and not a destination, and leaving here today I hope love guides us a little more than it did yesterday
- I hope that love guides you one more time than it did before when you re-think long held beliefs
- When you engage through the keyboard
- When you meet someone driving on the road, and in the checkout line at the store
- I recently had an encounter where I was discussing with someone what to do about something- doesn't matter what
- And she said to me: "What would love do?"
- It changed all of the decision making calculus in that moment- what would love do?
- May love- God's plumb line, Jesus' point of reference- guide us just a little more than it did before, each time.
- Perhaps we can be the one someone else considers neighborly at the end of the day
- As Jesus said, Go and do likewise.

Amen.