

Having Been Judged

Presented by Pastor Scott Walters on 07/21/19

At Crossroads United Methodist Church

Waunakee, WI

I.

I think that I've said to a few of you, before I knew Jane and I knew her family and they knew me.

Some of her family I knew through Church. But her aunt and uncle, Lucille & Leland Parsons had a neighborhood grocery store about a block and a half from my home. Going to pick up some milk or sandwich meat or baseball cards was almost a daily occurrence- Monday through Friday. It was a hub of the neighborhood.

It must have been about the time I finished Seminary and came back to Wisconsin, Leland and Lucille retired. At the same, they were feeling growing pressure from the larger grocery store chains in town. Parson's Grocery simply couldn't compete in price and in selection.

But they lasted as long as they did because of several factors:

- 1] They gave you personal service and were in no hurry to get on to the next sale;
- 2] They wrapped their meat in that reddish-brown butcher paper tied by string;
- 3] Next to their cash register was a couple of wooden, shoe box sized containers of little receipt books; one receipt book for each family. You see, they extended credit to families.

I was too young to even care about how Parson's decided to lend credit to a person or to a family. But I do remember a couple of times when a couple entered the store and asked for credit if they paid it up when they got their paycheck at the end of the month.

Were the prices a little higher at Parson's Grocery for these people? Yes, but they also didn't charge interest on what was put on credit. Move over MasterCard and Visa!

The Parson's willingness to extend credit was something that kids like my took as a part of the life, growing up. Yes, it helped the store offer something that the larger stores couldn't, but it was also I lifesaver for many families on the east side of Wisconsin Rapids.

II.

In the eight century before Christ, Amos went walking into the stores of Bethel in the Northern Kingdom of Israel. In and out of stores, he found no Lucille or Leland Parsons there. Not one. What he found instead were shopkeepers with a kind of glaze in their eyes.

People weren't treated like people. Amos stood back and watched the shopkeepers alter weights and scales so they they would measure in their favor, so that they could take the very last coins out of the pockets of those who would come there needing whatever was for sale.

As Amos stood there, the storekeepers would sweep the grain that had fallen off onto the floor, sweep up the grain and the chaff and gather it together and sell it to the people who came through the door—unknowing—and supposedly not worthy of anything better.

Amos would watch the shopkeepers; they would close their stores on the Sabbath. But Amos knew that the minute the Sabbath was over, they would rush back to their shops and it would be business as usual.

Amos was angry. Amos was outraged. Amos was so angry that he began preaching on the street corners. He began preaching words the people did not want to hear. Perhaps words we do not want to hear, yet they call out to us across the centuries.

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Because, Amos said, “because you have sold the sweepings of the wheat, because you have dared to take the coin out of the pocket of someone who needs it more than you do, and because you care more about the new Birkenstocks on your feet than you do about people who have no sandals at all, because you have done these things, this is what will happen to you.

And then Amos proclaims that there won't be any more celebrating. There will be mourning.. There will be tears. All the songs that will be sung will be sung in a minor key. (You see how Bill and Carly's musicology is helping me?)

Not just a few tears, the grief will be as profound as a parent's grief for their only child. While the nation was experiencing prosperity when Amos preached in the 8th century B.C., there will be no joy in the future. Because when you trample on the poor, you trample out all the joy in the land. The sweetness of prosperity will turn into bitterness.

III.

And it's at about this point that I'd like to have a conversation with Amos. *“Amos, are you sure? Because people have sold swept wheat, and because they're anxious for worship to be over so that can get on with their lives and their tweaked scales in their favor, that there's no solid earth to stand on? Does the punishment fit the crime, Amos?”*

And I think Amos would tell me, “Yes, when the most vulnerable among us, the weakest—the harassed—the disregarded and the discarded are treated unjustly in our marketplace, in our politics, in our hearts; when **they** are treated unjustly, we offend **God!**”

IV.

Amos could see a day coming when the people who gave the Word of God lipservice, would no longer be able to find it. I'm glad I wasn't Amos.

Friends, you and I can look over the almost 3,000 years since Amos walked the streets of Bethel. We get to look back over all those years and know that even when we have strayed – and the consequences we face and paid – we realize that God has not abandoned us – though it may have seemed so at the time.

God does not abandon you and me. God continues and continues and continues to try to bring the reality of the Word into the world by women and men who dare to live it and proclaim it – even a couple of groceries store keepers from Wisconsin Rapids.