

July 12, 2015
Amos 7:7-15

Proper 10b
Watch Out! A Lion!!

Grace, mercy, and peace be yours from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

As a kid, one place I always enjoyed going was the zoo. In fact I still venturing among the dangerous and wild animals at the zoo. One of my favorite zoos recently has been the St. Louis Zoo in Forest Park in St. Louis, MO. It's an amazing zoo. I enjoy seeing the monkey house, the orangutans, chimpanzees, and gorillas. Seeing the gentle giant giraffes and the Penguin Puffin Coast are highlights as well. One of my favorite places to go is "Big Cat Country". This is where the "Big Cats" of the world are housed. The Lions, Tigers, Jaguars, and Cheetahs are housed here. These are no Chester Cheetah's either. These are ferocious animals. It's the Lion though! Lion's are remarkable creatures. At nearly 500 pounds, the male lions are no little house cats. These ferocious animals I want on my team in a fight. Standing in front of the King of the Jungle is quite remarkable as long as he remains in his cage!

Panthera Leo for Latin lovers, the King of Beasts for nature lovers; behind bars for the lovers of life!

Oh I know these lions should be free, roaming the park feasting upon squirrels, rabbits, and the random stray cat (oh wait that is probably some form of cannibalism). But who would ever want to wake up to this: "Watch Out! A Lion!" is gone. Who wants an up close and personal visitation from the beast? Not me! The lion must remain in the cage.

Caged animals are always best. As a kid I was the throne-bearer in our grade school musical based on Daniel in the Lion's Den. Behn's animal farm was wild cat country. I was always afraid those cats would get free. Luckily they never did. Our teachers tried to get Behn to bring in a caged lion for added affect, but luckily they weren't successful. Remember, the lion must remain in the cage!

You and I aren't the only ones who feel this way! Amaziah—the priest of Bethel—is building a career around keeping the Lion in his cage! Only this Lion's name is Yahweh!

Amos 1:2 states: "Yahweh roars from Zion and utters his voice from Jerusalem!" The last thing Amaziah wants to hear is "Watch Out! A LION!" So whatever the cost, whatever the compromise, this Lion must never, ever rumble in Israel's jungle! Amaziah's ecclesiastical policy means that anyone who rattles, shakes, and opens cages must get out of the country immediately!

Amos is currently preaching in Israel and he is no prophet nor son of a prophet. In fact he left his job as a shepherd and fig picker from his home land of Tekoa to answer God's call to preach repentance to the people of Israel.

“Watch out! A LION!” Amaziah must begin operation “Safe Church Policy” because it is through Amos that this roaring Lion is saying to Israel: Amos 2:6 “For three sins of Israel and for four, I will not revoke the punishment.” Amos 3:2 “You only have I know of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your sins.” Amos 5:18 “Woe to you who desire the day of the Lord! Why would you have the day of the Lord? It is darkness, and not light, ¹” Amos 5:21 “I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. ²” Amos 6:1 “Woe to those who are at ease in Zion.”

These are only a few of what Amos declares to Israel. And you can clearly see this is no “Still, small voice!” This is no “Gentle Jesus meek and mild. This is not the picture of Jesus carrying the sheep on his shoulders. And this is no tame, purring little kitty cat. Amos 3:8 says “The lion has roared, who will not fear? Lord Yahweh has spoken. Who can but prophesy?”

Amos is preaching to the people their sin and pointing out where they have fallen and Amaziah responds for the sake of King Jeroboam II and the people: “Get out, you seer! Go back to the land of Judah. Earn your bread there and do your prophesying there!” When interpreted in the language of today, Amaziah throws on his boxing gloves and says, “Amos, this temple isn’t big enough for the two of us. So get out of my face you fig pickin’, low wattage shepherd boy prophet wannabe! My motto is tolerate, let sleeping dogs lie! I long to cooperate, to all radicals I say ‘bye.’”

This priest (who really isn’t a priest) is an expert in image building, marketing techniques, public relations, and salesmanship. In fact, in Amos 7:11 when he reports to his boss, King Jeroboam, what the prophet is preaching he conveniently avoids the sticky issues of syncretistic worship, poverty, oppression, social injustice, and materialistic worship. His king, Jeroboam ben Joash, will no doubt recommend a raise for Amaziah because at Bethel this priest is running such a smooth religious operation.

Dear Brothers and Sisters, do not be deceived! There are powerful forces in our lives, in our church, and in our world shouting to us, “Be an Amaziah clone!” Be content with religious clichés and jargon instead of blazing, burning truth!” Sit satisfied with the motto, “Come weal, come woe, my status is quo!” And don’t forget that as an Amaziah clone, one preaches tolerance and not repentance, therapy instead of confession and absolution. We are all like Amaziah in a way! We force our opinions on the church. We want it run our way. Who needs that sin talk anyways? We would like the religious clichés and jargon instead of the truth. Some of us would like us to see us grow by numbers and not worry about our faith life. Others of us don’t want to do any sort of outreach. I find myself being an Amaziah as well. Sometimes I find myself pleasing everyone...but that’s not what I am Called here to do! That is not what I was ordained to do. If you catch me doing it, call me out for my sin, and tell me to preach the law in its harshness and the gospel in its sweetness.

¹ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. (2001). (Am 5:18). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

² *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. (2001). (Am 5:21). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

We live in a culture today that systematically is domesticating, de-fanging, and de-clawing the roaring lion. They are silencing the Lion's roar. It's working. The lion is being silenced in our culture today. In 2 Timothy 3 Paul states: "But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days...people will have the form of godliness by deny its power." How true is that! Even those people are now starting to deny their godliness.

But Living in the power Amos says, "I am neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet." When interpreted in our language, Amos is saying, "I am not a religious professional like you Amaziah, paid to make pious pronouncements on public platforms. I will not be bought, compromised, dettered, diluted, or delayed. I will not flinch in the face of sacrifice, negotiate at the table of the enemy, ponder at the pool of popularity, or meander at the maze of mediocrity. I won't give up, back up, or let up until I've preached up, prayed up, and stayed up."

And really, should this shock us! Moses stands his ground and confronts old Pharaoh with Yahweh's thunderous... "Let MY PEOPLE GO!" Nathan courageously puts his ecclesatical career, let alone his life on the line when he summons David with the words, "You are the man!" Elijah takes the heat from Ahab who calls him "the troubler in Israel!" Jeremiah daringly rewrites Yahweh's word after King Jehoachim has sliced it, diced it, and burned it. And Daniel's dream of the night shatters Nebuchadnezzar's illusion of the day. As the church of God today, let's live with these politically incorrect as well as the next one and preach with all its fervor the message of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

Joining this "goodly fellowship" of the politically incorrect is Israel's greatest radical. Why, he once had the courage to make a whip and then use it to cleanse His Father's House. Another time he looked the religious leaders of his day straight in the eye and said, "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs that look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead man's bones." Climactically he stands before the high priest and confesses, "In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven."

But this Lion is also the Lamb, and his mighty power is made perfect in weakness. Jesus allows soldiers to march him along the Via Dolorosa while he shoulders his crossbar with blood dripping from his butchered back. Jesus allows his executioners to strip Him naked, shove Him to the ground, and pin Him to wood with their tools of torture. And Jesus...He absorbs the spit and the insults without asking His Father to dispense of twelve legions of angels.

Societies don't execute Captain Kangaroo, Mr. Rogers, or Dora the Explorer...they don't seem to execute Miley Cyrus or Oprah Winfrey or LeBron James, but they do destroy people who shake their religious establishments to the very core. "There," they said on that Friday afternoon, "no need to call 911 or animal control. There is no more need to Keep Watch for the lion! He's crucified, dead, and buried!"

But, our message doesn't stop there...coming forth from the tomb, the lion rumbles in his jungle. Revelation 5:5: "See, the Lion of the Tribe of Judah has triumphed!" There is nothing dead about our JESUS! His is no syrupy, sentimental love! It's not a love that tolerates sin! It is a love that WINS! His fierce love for you is driven by nails, marked with scars, crowned with thorns, and lives again for you!

Now what do you suppose Amaziah will say to Amos if the prophet finally gives up, gives in, and goes along...like many people do, just to be a good ol' boy? What will this priest say if Amos becomes a "yes" man to King Jeroboam II? Amaziah—and all those like him—will say, "Welcome to our religious club where our motto is "Come weal or woe, the status must forever remain quo!"

But what do you think Amos will say if Amaziah confesses, "Enough is enough. I will no longer sell my soul on the altar called compromise; its time to let the Lion loose!" Amos will raise his right hand, make the sign of the cross, and announce what you hear every Sunday after you confess in the absolution: "I forgive your all of your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen."

Now may the peace of God which passes all human understanding, guard your hearts and your minds and keep them focused in Christ Jesus our Lord and Savior. Amen.

These words are adapted from Restore the Roar and Rev. Reed Lessing, pastor of St. Michael's in Fort Wayne, IN.