

#### Amos 7:7-15

7 This is what the LORD showed me: The LORD was standing by a wall, with a plumb line in his hand. 8 The LORD said to me, "Amos, what do you see?" "A plumb line," I said. Then the LORD said, "See, I am setting a plumb line in the middle of my people Israel. I will never again forgive them. 9 The shrines of Isaac will be made desolate, and the holy places of Israel will be laid waste, and I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword." 10 Then Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, reported to Israel's King Jeroboam, "Amos has plotted against you within the house of Israel. The land isn't able to cope with everything that he is saying. 11 Amos has said, 'Jeroboam will die by the sword, and Israel will be forced out of its land.'" 12 Amaziah said to Amos, "You who see things, go, run away to the land of Judah, eat your bread there, and prophesy there; 13 but never again prophesy at Bethel, for it is the king's holy place and his royal house." 14 Amos answered Amaziah, "I am not a prophet, nor am I a prophet's son; but I am a shepherd, and a trimmer of sycamore trees. 15 But the LORD took me from shepherding the flock, and the LORD said to me, 'Go, prophesy to my people Israel.'

#### Psalms 85:8-13

8 Let me hear what the LORD God says, because he speaks peace to his people and to his faithful ones. Don't let them return to foolish ways. 9 God's salvation is very close to those who honor him so that his glory can live in our land. 10 Faithful love and truth have met; righteousness and peace have kissed. 11 Truth springs up from the ground; righteousness gazes down from heaven. 12 Yes, the LORD gives what is good, and our land yields its produce. 13 Righteousness walks before God, making a road for his steps.

#### Ephesians 1:3-14

3 Bless the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! He has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing that comes from heaven. 4 God chose us in Christ to be holy and blameless in God's presence before the creation of the world. 5 God destined us to be his adopted children through Jesus Christ because of his love. This was according to his goodwill and plan 6 and to honor his glorious grace that he has given to us freely through the Son whom he loves. 7 We have been ransomed through his Son's blood, and we have forgiveness for our failures based on his overflowing grace, 8 which he poured over us with wisdom and understanding. 9 God revealed his hidden design to us, which is according to his goodwill and the plan that he intended to accomplish through his Son. 10 This is what God planned for the climax of all times: to bring all things together in Christ, the things in heaven along with the things on earth. 11 We have also received an inheritance in Christ. We were destined by the plan of God, who accomplishes everything according to his design. 12 We are called to be an honor to God's glory because we were the first to hope in Christ. 13 You too heard the word of truth in Christ, which is the good news of your salvation. You were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit because you believed in Christ. 14 The Holy Spirit is the down payment on our inheritance, which is applied toward our redemption as God's own people, resulting in the honor of God's glory.

#### Mark 6:14-29

14 Herod the king heard about these things, because the name of Jesus had become well-known. Some were saying, "John the Baptist has been raised from the dead, and

this is why miraculous powers are at work through him." 15 Others were saying, "He is Elijah." Still others were saying, "He is a prophet like one of the ancient prophets." 16 But when Herod heard these rumors, he said, "John, whom I beheaded, has been raised to life." 17 He said this because Herod himself had arranged to have John arrested and put in prison because of Herodias, the wife of Herod's brother Philip. Herod had married her, 18 but John told Herod, "It's against the law for you to marry your brother's wife!" 19

So Herodias had it in for John. She wanted to kill him, but she couldn't. 20 This was because Herod respected John. He regarded him as a righteous and holy person, so he protected him. John's words greatly confused Herod, yet he enjoyed listening to him. 21 Finally, the time was right. It was on one of Herod's birthdays, when he had prepared a feast for his high-ranking officials and military officers and Galilee's leading residents. 22 Herod's daughter Herodias came in and danced, thrilling Herod and his dinner guests. The king said to the young woman, "Ask me whatever you wish, and I will give it to you." 23 Then he swore to her, "Whatever you ask I will give to you, even as much as half of my kingdom." 24 She left the banquet hall and said to her mother, "What should I ask for?" "John the Baptist's head," Herodias replied. 25 Hurrying back to the ruler, she made her request: "I want you to give me John the Baptist's head on a plate, right this minute." 26 Although the king was upset, because of his solemn pledge and his guests, he didn't want to refuse her. 27 So he ordered a guard to bring John's head. The guard went to the prison, cut off John's head, 28 brought his head on a plate, and gave it to the young woman, and she gave it to her mother. 29 When John's disciples heard what had happened, they came and took his dead body and laid it in a tomb.

## **Sermon**

Grace to you and peace from God our Creator,  
our Lord Jesus Christ, and the  
Holy Spirit. Amen.

The Lutheran denomination, our own theological home, came to prominence in a “tell me” culture. What I mean by that is that, beginning in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, information was primarily carried through words, whether spoken or written. When people wanted to know something, they'd say, “tell me!” We hear that in our Lutheran emphasis upon the Word. Words spoken in worship through preaching and words written in our scriptures, the Bible.

In fact, this emphasis on words changed the shape of our worship spaces. Before the modern era,

so before about year 1500 CE, churches didn't have pews. They didn't even have any seats! You see, worship was a much more bodily event than a literary interaction prior to the Protestant Reformation, so the space for the congregation was almost entirely open for free movement. You might listen for a while to the sermon, then wander over to the stained glass windows to wonder at them for a while, then have some personal confession with the priest and spend some time in personal or communal prayer prior to taking communion. With all this movement, benches didn't make sense.

But when the sermon and reading became central acts of worship, when we became a "tell me" culture, we didn't need to move our bodies to

engage with the main content of worship. Instead, we wanted more time to sit, to listen, to reflect upon the readings and preaching. People initially sat on floor cushions until pews became more popular and more affordable. Now, this change in our worship space, and in the very culture itself, came about, in large part, due to technology. It wasn't a major theological shift, because Jan Huss said the same things that Luther did over a hundred years before the Reformation took hold in Germany. What made Luther's time so different was that the printing press changed how we received information. This technology making books common, which increased the practices of reading, which made information cheaper and more accessible to lots of people, all of

which changed how we worship. As words began to dominate our culture, both written and spoken, the way that we worshipped radically changed, as did the shape of our worship spaces.

In the midst of this “tell me” culture, the church’s mission to speak to this culture drove the construction of the space, the emphasis of the theology, the behavior of the people, the very identity of the church.

We’re at another watershed moment, another massive shift in the culture, much like the printing press that contributed to the Protestant Reformation. We’ve gone from a “tell me” culture to a “show me” culture. Just like the advent of cheap and accessible books 500 years ago, the development of the

internet, that world wide web that connects our phones, tablets, computers, and televisions to people across the world, has drastically changed the way that our culture communicates. Rather than telling through words, more and more people are interested in being shown, through seeing visuals. In general, people under the age of 45 pay much more attention now to images and actions rather than words or statements.

For Lutherans, we see this development in the struggle to declare we're saved by grace through faith. While we've taught our children that truth, we haven't taught them that this teaching should radically change their lives as well. This has left us with a generation of people crying out, "God loves me no

matter what!" even as their behavior looks nothing like Jesus, the God we know and love, the one whose grace has saved us in the first place.

You see, this shift to a "show me" culture means more than just that most people born after 1970 or so prefer to watch three minute YouTube videos instead of reading War and Peace, though that is most certainly true. It's not just about changing the furniture in our worship spaces or putting up screens in our sanctuaries. What it means is that our emphasis on words without actions means less and less in our communities. To say something without doing the thing that we say lacks a cultural resonance, for words unaccompanied by deeds appear entirely without integrity. In a church where we've constantly

said that God saves us despite our actions, we're finding out that our behavior – how we treat the world in which we live and the people who live with us in this world – matters deeply. That actions speak louder than words has never been more true than it is today. We can no longer just share the Gospel with our words. We must, we must share the Gospel with our deeds, our actions, our behaviors. We're in a "show me" culture, one where sanctification, where God-like behavior, matters.

Now, hear me clearly: Our behavior doesn't save us, but our behavior can connect the world with her savior. Sanctification, this process of developing holy behavior, isn't to ensure our eternity. It's to bring a taste of eternity to a world that desperately needs it.

But for us, that requires change, and a massive one at that. Change is something that Amos knew about. We hear in our scriptures today that Amos wasn't raised as a prophet, but as a farmer and a trimmer of sycamore trees. "But the Lord," Amos says, "took me from shepherding the flock," and made him into a prophet. The Lord changed the identity, the vocation, the behavior of Samuel and redirects him to become an active witness to a culture in need of that image. God reshaped Amos in order to use him as witness.

Clichés drive me crazy, probably because they're so cliché, they're so overused and unoriginal. But here's the thing about them. They're true. One of the clichés that I heard early on in ministry, and one

that still rings deeply true today, is this: God doesn't call the equipped. God equips the called. How true is that of Amos? God didn't find the best public speaker or politician to send as a prophet. Instead God found a faithful shepherd, trimming trees, who desired to serve God. Then God equipped Amos with the skill and knowledge needed for the ministry God has in mind.

In this equipping, though, God doesn't just give Amos a toolbox and expect him to use it well. God actually shifts his identity. God shaped Amos with a plan and gave him a plumb line to show Israel the need for change. God seeks to do the same for us. God is, even now, seeking to move us from being a

“tell me” church to a “show me” church, a church that behaves in ways that reflect our beliefs.

For us, our plumb line is this shift from a focus solely on what we say or believe and to what we do, moving to a place where our actions and our words align with one another. Do we live like Christ matters? Does Christ shape how we treat our waiters and waitresses? Does Christ affect how we respond to people who come to us, asking for assistance? Does Christ form how we treat people of other races, other cultures, other ethnicities? Does our behavior tell people anything good about Christ?

Or, conversely, do people hear us preaching about Christ and then lacking compassion for the poor or homeless in our midst? Do people hear us

saying we're Christian and then spewing words of hateful judgment and vile suspicion? When our culture says, "show me," what are we showing people about Christ?

Think about the words in our worship. We, every week, pray for God's kingdom to come and will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. Are we actively pursuing that with our actions? Are we giving to the poor every time we're asked? Are we feeding the hungry that we see on the streets? Are we working for justice for outcasts in society? The world is looking at us, and hears our prayers. What they want to know is whether we care enough about our prayers to become a part of the solution that we seek.

One of my professors used to tell us that “Our lives may be the only sermons that people hear this week.” Your lives, dear friends, your decisions and actions, may be the only sermons that someone hears this week. How will the New River Valley know that Christ has something for them if we don’t live like Christ has something for us?

Today, at our congregational meeting, we’re voting on the mission statement that our congregation has been considering for months now.

**Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church: A Fellowship**

**Living and Sharing the Love of God through worship,**

**service, wellness, and hospitality.** Don’t take this

lightly! If we’re going to live and share the love of

God, God just might take us away from our fields and

sycamore trees, might like Amos take us from being farmers and totally change our identity. This kind of thing must guide our decisions and actions, our words and our deeds, that we might live and share God's love in this space (worship), in our community through outreach and compassion (service), in the formation of Christ-like lives (wellness), and through the radical inclusion of people unlike us into our midst (hospitality).

That's a mission statement that recognizes we're in a massive cultural shift. Just like the printing press 500 years ago, the internet has shaped not just how we worship, not just how we interact, but our very identities. That's a mission statement designed to say that the Gospel is not just about our words, but about

our deeds. That's a mission statement that isn't just about telling people about Jesus, it's about showing people about Jesus, not just through the screens on our walls, on our desks, or in our pockets, but showing people the power of Jesus through the screens of our lives. That's a mission statement that says we, like Amos, are called out of our comfortable lives and into a radical new identity: living and sharing the love of God in a way that the world around us can understand. This isn't just a "tell me" mission statement. It's a "show me" statement for a "show me" church. We must speak the name of Jesus and live the life of Jesus if we want to see new people come to know and love the God that knows and loves us.

Like Amos, God is calling us into a new place, a new age, to change. We may not feel equipped, for it is truly uncharted territory. But God is calling us, and will equip us for the journey. We are surely saved by grace. But the lives we live, our words verified by our actions, may be the only sermon of grace that people hear this week. How we live just might introduce people to Jesus, just might connect people with the grace of their salvation. God's reshaping our lives from tree trimmers into Gospel liars. It's time to proclaim the Gospel, to show the world Jesus, not just with our words, but with our decisions, our actions, our entire lives. Amen.