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Our Saviour Lutheran Church
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Let us pray...May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, for you are our strength and you are most certainly our redeemer. Amen.

Sisters and brothers in Christ, today's reading from the Old Testament book of Amos contains what we commonly refer to as an object lesson.

As we probably know, an object lesson is a teaching method in which a physical object or visual aid is used to convey a particular lesson.

So, for instance, one might use H₂O for an object lesson when speaking about the Holy Trinity, such that God is like H₂O.

H₂O manifests itself as ice, water, and steam.

In like manner, the Triune God reveals God's self as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Ice, water, and steam are three expressions of H₂O, just like Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are three expressions of God.

To be sure, H₂O is a very good object for a lesson about the Holy Trinity.

But back to our reading from the book of Amos and its object lesson.

And in this passage it is striking to note that the one teaching the object lesson is not the prophet Amos.

No, Amos is not the teacher here. The teacher is God.

And God apparently likes using objects when getting a point across.

How many times for instance does the Son of God, Jesus Christ, use objects when he is teaching?

The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, says Jesus.

The kingdom of heaven is like a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son.

The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field.

The kingdom of heaven is like a sower who cast seeds upon the soil.

The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and kneaded into dough.

The kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet cast into the sea, which gathers fish of every kind.

So on and so forth.

Jesus over and over again uses object lessons to make a point about the kingdom of heaven.

Personally, I believe if Jesus was walking among us today, he could compare the kingdom of heaven to practically anything, so good is he at object lessons.

The kingdom of heaven is like the Sudoku puzzle one finds in the newspaper.

The kingdom of heaven is like FaceBook.

The kingdom of heaven is like Twizzlers candy.

You name it, Jesus could probably tell you an object lesson about it.

That is just how good God is at object lessons.

PAUSE

And, here, in our passage from the book of Amos, God takes up the challenge of teaching an object lesson about a plumb line.

The reading says the Lord was standing beside a wall built with a plumb line.

And the Lord said to Amos, "What do you see?"

Amos replied, "I see a plumb line."

And then the Lord said, "See, I am setting a plumb line in the midst of my people Israel."

See, I am setting a plumb line in the midst of my people Israel.

The object or visual aid in this object lesson is a plumb line.

And if we didn't know, a plumb line consists of a weight suspended from a piece of string.

A plumb line then is used as a vertical reference line to ensure a structure is centered, because a plumb line when suspended provides a true vertical line by means of gravity.

And a painter or carpenter then will employ plumb lines to keep their work straight.

For without the use of a plumb line, workers risk their work ending up crooked and off center.

PAUSE

Now in our passage from the book of Amos, God is not see God's self as a painter nor as a carpenter.

God is not see God's self as some contractor who needs to make sure the construction work God is doing doesn't end up crooked.

No, God does not see himself as a painter, carpenter, or contractor.

No, God is not talking about some construction project here.

Instead, God uses the image of a plumb line so as to speak of the people of Israel.

The Lord says, "See, I am setting a plumb line in the midst of my people Israel."

Yes, it is the very people of God who in this object lesson are measured with a plumb line.

PAUSE

Now, whether we realize it or not, we as people employ all sorts of proverbial plumb lines in our lives.

We, you and me, use all sorts of things to measure our lives.

We use are all sorts of things to align our lives.

There are all sorts of things we use to decide if our lives are where they need to be.

Maybe we have told ourselves that by this point in our lives we would be married, have children, and have started a family.

Maybe we have told ourselves that by this point in our lives we would be this far along in our education.

At this point in our lives, we would have finished high school and have entered college.

Or at this point we would have entered the military and have achieved such and such a rank.

Or, we would be this far along in our civilian careers, this far along on the economic ladder, that we would have obtained this or that position by this point.

At this point in our lives, we have told ourselves that we would have squirrelled away this amount of money for retirement, that we would be travelling, that we would be on our own schedule.

PAUSE

Yes, there are all sorts of things by which we measure our lives.

There are all sorts of plumb lines we employ to gauge our lives.

But God's plumb line, sisters and brothers in Christ, God's plumb line is quite different from the plumb lines I just described.

God's plumb line differs somewhat from our vision life.

God's plumb line differs from our vision of family, education, career, and retirement.

Not that these things are unimportant. Not that we shouldn't keep these things in perspective.

But God's plumb line takes into consideration more than our narrow vision.

God's plumb line takes into consideration the well-being of all people.

As we see in the book of Amos, where God judges the people of Israel according to God's plumb line.

In the book of Amos, God names the injustices the people have committed.

In the book of Amos, God measures the people and finds them wanting.

For the people have taken advantage of the poor and needy.

For the people have exploited other people, namely their female slaves.

For the people have misappropriated funds.

These are only some of crooked ways of the people which God lists in the book of Amos.

These are only some of ways in which the people have lived off- centered lives.

Their path is not straight. Their living is wayward.

The people need a plumb line. Indeed, they need God's plumb line.

PAUSE

The situation is little different in our gospel reading.

There we read that John the Baptist was arrested and imprisoned by King Herod.

Why? Because John the Baptist called attention to the crooked ways of Herod, who had married his brother Philip's wife, Herodias.

John the Baptist's words act as plumb line for Herod, who doesn't take kindly to being judged by John.

But the plumb line of God is meant to be a measure for centering ALL people, including the powerful like King Herod, so that all people might act rightly and justly.

PAUSE

Today, we can't help but long for God's plumb line.

Sisters and brothers in Christ, as the people of Israel once needed God's plumb line, so, too, do we need God's plumb line.

The world in every age needs God's plumb line.

And what is this plumb line, but the voice of God's servant, the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, like John the Baptist, or the voice of a herdsman, a dresser of sycamore trees like Amos.

The people of every age need a plumb line.

And God satisfied that need ultimately in sending his Son Jesus Christ.

In the person of Jesus Christ, God dropped himself as a plumb line into this world, to measure the human race.

In Jesus Christ, God is measuring the human family, observing whether the human family is equal to God's vision for humanity.

Yes, by that plumb line that is Jesus Christ, God is calling all people to accountability.

The plumb line is the Word of God, spoken through those who came before Jesus—Amos, John the Baptist, and others.

The plumb line is the Word of God, enfleshed in Jesus Christ.

By the plumb line, Jesus Christ, God is centering the world...

By the plumb line, Jesus Christ, God is setting the world on the straight path where love and mercy is to be expressed toward all people.

PAUSE

And the remarkable thing, the most remarkable thing, Friends, is that you and I are also the plumb line.

The remarkable thing is that you and I are also the object lesson.

For you and I also speak the Word of God.

For again, the plumb line is any and every individual God raises up to draw attention to the crooked ways of the world.

The plumb line is Amos, a herdsman, a dresser of sycamore trees.

The plumb line is John the Baptist, a resident of the wilderness who ate locusts and wild honey.

The plumb line is also you and me. You and I are the plumb line, too, when we spread God's word of mercy and love.

The plumb line is also you and me, when we declare that this path or that is crooked.

The plumb line is also you and me, when we help bring clarity to how the world is off center.

Whether we are pointing out injustice in the world.

Whether we are pointing out indifference in the world.

Whether we are pointing out hypocrisy in the world.

Whether we are pointing out flagrant self-interest in the world.

Whether we are pointing out cruelty in the world.

Whatever sin and evil we are pointing out in the world, we are a plumb line if we name the crooked ways.

PAUSE

The Lord said, "See, I am setting a plumb line in the midst of my people." And it shall be an object lesson to us all.

God is measuring in the world. God is assessing the people's ways.

And the best way for us not to be found wanting...

The best way for us to be equal to God's standard, is for us to be about the proclamation of God's Word.

We will not be found to be wanting if we ourselves are a plumb line, spreading the Word of God, spreading God's word of love and mercy.

In Christ, we pray...Amen.