

Readings for the Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

10th July 2022

First Reading: Amos 7:7-17

This is what the LORD showed me: the Lord was standing beside a wall built with a plumb-line, with a plumb-line in his hand. And the LORD said to me, 'Amos, what do you see?' And I said, 'A plumb-line.' Then the Lord said, 'See, I am setting a plumb-line in the midst of my people Israel; I will never again pass them by; the high places of Isaac shall be made desolate, and the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid waste, and I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword.'

Then Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, sent to King Jeroboam of Israel, saying, 'Amos has conspired against you in the very centre of the house of Israel; the land is not able to bear all his words. For thus Amos has said, "Jeroboam shall die by the sword, and Israel must go into exile away from his land."'

And Amaziah said to Amos, 'O seer, go, flee away to the land of Judah, earn your bread there, and prophesy there; but never again prophesy at Bethel, for it is the king's sanctuary, and it is a temple of the kingdom.' Then Amos answered Amaziah, 'I am no prophet, nor a prophet's son; but I am a herdsman, and a dresser of sycamore trees, and the LORD took me from following the flock, and the LORD said to me, "Go, prophesy to my people Israel."

Now therefore hear the word of the LORD. You say, "Do not prophesy against Israel, and do not preach against the house of Isaac." Therefore thus says the LORD: "Your wife shall become a prostitute in the city, and your sons and your daughters shall fall by the sword, and your land shall be parcelled out by line; you yourself shall die in an unclean land, and Israel shall surely go into exile away from its land."

Second Reading: Colossians 1:1-14

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, To the saints and faithful brothers and sisters in Christ in Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father.

In our prayers for you we always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, for we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. You have heard of this hope before in the word of the truth, the gospel that has come to you. Just as it is bearing fruit and growing in the whole world, so it has been bearing fruit among yourselves from the day you heard it and truly comprehended the grace of God. This you learned from Epaphras, our beloved fellow-servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf, and he has made known to us your love in the Spirit.

For this reason, since the day we heard it, we have not ceased praying for you and asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you may lead lives worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, as you bear fruit in every good work and as you grow in the knowledge of God. May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Gospel: St Luke 10:25-37

A lawyer stood up to test Jesus. 'Teacher,' he said, 'what must I do to inherit eternal life?' He said to him, 'What is written in the law? What do you read there?' He answered, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself.' And he said to him, 'You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.'

But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, 'And who is my neighbour?' Jesus replied, 'A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while travelling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, "Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend." Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?' He said, 'The one who showed him mercy.' Jesus said to him, 'Go and do likewise.'

A Reflection for Sea Sunday

Living with difference presents a real challenge to humanity. Sometimes it erupts into suspicion and argument – Unionists v Independents or Brexiteers v Remainers; sometimes into conflict and violence – Palestinian v Zionist or even Russian v Ukrainian.

Distrust and rivalry between nations is nothing new, and the gospel reading for today – the Parable of the Good Samaritan – is written against the background of hatred and enmity between two peoples which had its origins in events some 700 years before Christ. The Samaritans, descendants of the northern Israelite tribes not deported after the fall of the Kingdom of Israel, claimed to follow the true religion of the ancient Israelites; a claim which the Jews, the descendants of those exiled after the fall of Judah who'd returned from exile and rebuilt Jerusalem (in the 6th Century BC), bitterly rejected as they saw themselves in that role. With each destroying or desecrating the sacred places of the other, you might say they hated each other with a perfect hatred!

In the midst of this, Jesus uses the division to make a point to a religious establishment obsessed with its own tribal identity and ritual purity – that people who are very different from you, people who you would dismiss out of hand, even people you hate, can have a better grasp of the truth than you do.

However, sometimes difference is characterised simply by ignorance. Perhaps we don't understand the contribution a particular group makes to the world at large, or the specific challenges they face on a day-to-day basis.

Among the often-overlooked groups in our world – and there are quite a few – sea farers have good reason to feel taken for granted. With a way of life very different from most, involving long periods away from home and facing

both considerable boredom and danger on a regular basis, their vital contribution to normal, everyday life is seldom appreciated.

This Sunday is Sea Sunday – a day when we're encouraged to remember and pray for sea-farers and their families, giving thanks for their lives and work. In a world where our desire for speed has emphasised travel by road, rail and air, it's salutary to remember that over 90% of all world trade (including fuel) takes place on the seas and oceans of the world and involves some one-and-a-half million seafarers.

Be it through fishing, windfarms, oil and gas platforms, shipping, defence, rescue – I'm sure I will have forgotten some – each make their own particular contribution and face their own particular perils. But all share one thing in common; much of what they do is not understood and remains invisible to most people for most of the time.

Living where we do, we should be especially aware of the many challenges facing the fishing industry, and how a number of communities feel betrayed by successive governments and institutions of all shades. We should also be aware, almost 34 years to the day since the Piper Alpha disaster, of the risks and privations faced by those working offshore as well as the benefits they may enjoy.

The fact is that every hour of the day and night, on the oceans, seas and major waterways of the world, sea farers and a whole host of others work in the challenging maritime environment in roles which underpin almost everything we do.

Today, as we think about difference – and the insights that those who are 'different' might bring into our lives – let us especially remember and give thanks for sea farers and their families, and all who support them, and the contribution they make to our world.