

Today's Collect asks of God that we "may know and understand what things [we] ought to do, and also may have grace and power faithfully to accomplish them." What things we ought to do...." The readings say: "be prophetic"! As we read Amos it's important to remember that we're past the time of official prophets, the ones who represented the King, and into the time of the great prophets, the ones who stood in opposition to "business as usual".

So here's Amos with his famous metaphor of a plumb line asking – and answering – a very basic question: how does Hebrew society match up to the demands of God for justice, kindness, mercy, and humility? Or, to use the language of the psalm, have "Mercy and truth....met together; [have] righteousness and peace....kissed each other"?

That's what prophets did – look at their culture, compare it to true faithfulness, then draw the conclusions they reach to the attention of that culture: "Okay, folks, here's the way it is....."

Of course, Amos' answer wasn't "everything's just fine, thank you very much"! Rather, God's really ticked off, and that doesn't bode well for the King. Kings – and their courts – tend not to look with favor on those who tell them they've screwed up and are going to suffer the consequences.

Instead, based on Amos' words, Amaziah, the official priest of the King, identifies Amos as just that sort of unwelcome prophet that kings hated, and with no subtlety at all tells him, essentially, to "get lost", to go and do his prophesying somewhere else. And what does Amos say of himself? "I'm no prophet, I'm just a working stiff unlucky enough to catch God's attention!"

Perhaps John the Baptist would have said the same thing. Irrespective, he, too, was known for asking that same, very basic question: how does Jewish society match up to the demands of God for justice, kindness, mercy, and humility?

Similar answer to that from the Powers That Be! Just as Amaziah was the King's voice, so in Mark is Salome. Prophetic ministry can be tricky! If you don't keep your head down.....! But then, you wouldn't be a prophet if you did.

But what about us – how do we fit into this story?

Well, oops! Here's what the writer of the letter to the Ephesians says: "[God] chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love."

"[God] chose us....." just like Amos. Just like John the Baptist.

And while Paul himself observes that we each have different ministries, and not all of us are called to be prophets all the time, all of us are called to be prophets some of the time.

The triennial General Convention of our Church just concluded in Indianapolis, and they did a lot of prophetic stuff, not the least of which is an invitation for all of us to start living according to the Anglican Communion's "5 Marks of Mission":

1. To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom
2. To teach, baptize and nurture new believers
3. To respond to human need by loving service
4. To seek to transform unjust structures of society
5. To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth

“Being a prophet” underpins all of them – they all require us to offer an alternate way of living, identifying in the process those parts of our common life as a culture that are in need of transformation.

I said “they” – but it’s really “we”. When we elect delegates to our annual Diocesan Convention they, in turn, elect representatives to General Convention. We are they, and they are us! So what did we do? A lot of things that could be described as about transformation:

- We started a process of church-wide structural reform based on those 5 marks of mission that’s designed to re-imagine the workings of the Episcopal Church in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century – to prepare us for a different world (something I’ve been talking about with you for some time). It is highly significant that this resolution was passed unanimously.
- We said, “we won’t be pushed into a black-or-white view of the Anglican Communion – it’s not about legislation but about relationship – so we declined to say “yes” or “no” to the so-called “Anglican Covenant” – rather, we said “let’s keep talking and praying, especially with those who disagree with us”. In other words, we said that “it’s all about relationship, not legislation”.
- We committed ourselves, over the next three years, to seek to respond to issues of poverty and injustice through “teaching, preaching, organizing, advocating, and building mutually transformative relationships with those who are poor to focus our hearts and the mission of our congregations and dioceses on reducing poverty and increasing economic and racial justice.”
- And we said, most loudly, “every baptized person, regardless of gender, has – by virtue of that baptism – has unfettered access to the sacraments of our Church. By a super-super majority of 77% we authorized the use of a rite for the blessing of same-gender unions.

We did a lot more – there were over 400 resolutions submitted and addressed. But the direction is unmistakable – we are committing ourselves to an emerging vision of “church” that seeks to answer positively the questions that Amos asked, so that if the divine plumb line is held up against our faithful response, we will not be found ‘out of true’.

May it be so! And the people said, AMEN.