

Pastor Luke C. Werre

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Sermon Text: Amos 7:10-17

“JUST WORDS”

He was only a boy of 5 or 6. As the family walked along the empty beach they admired a sand castle someone had crafted earlier that day. Upon seeing it, the boy gleefully ran up and jumped on it, destroying it. The family let out a collective, “Aww!” The dad muttered a single word: “Typical.” It was just a word. But it stabbed deeply into that boy’s heart and stayed with him the rest of his life.

A teenager was playing high school football. He was not in the limelight like a quarterback or a wide receiver. But he was sturdy enough for the offensive line. After a certain play, he heard two words ring out above the din of the crowd which he recognized as his dad’s distinctive voice: “Nice block!” They were just words. But those two words stuck with him the rest of his life.

They are just words. But words have power. Someone may be inspired by the power of a well-crafted poem. Or moved by a well-delivered line in a movie. Even though they’re just words, they may be censured on social media if regarded as dangerous. Laws are even passed over words designated as hate speech. In some cases, the punishment for words may be more severe than for actual crimes. Yet aren’t they just words? So much for the old saying that sticks and stones may break my bones but words can never harm me! Apparently they can.

The sermon on Independence Day two weeks ago noted that God has given the government soldiers, police, guns and jails, but not the Church. He has not given the Church the use of force. To the Church He has only given words. That’s all that God has given to His public ministers to use, just words. Yet, if words have power, the words God has given to the Church and ministry have even more power. For these are words filled with the Holy Spirit. These words have power to do what no other earthly words can do, to do the miraculous in the human heart, to work repentance, to create faith in Jesus, to raise the spiritually dead to spiritual life.

It was with words that the prophet Amos stirred things up for a nation. In order for this lesson from Amos chapter seven to make sense, I must give you a little background.

Shortly after the reign of King Solomon the nation of Israel was ripped in two by civil war. To the north were ten tribes who retained the name Israel. To the south were two

tribes, Judah and Benjamin, but were called Judah. So there's Israel and Judah. Jerusalem was in Judah. Jeroboam, the first king of Israel, didn't want his citizens traveling south to Jerusalem in Judah to worship at the temple multiple times a year. So Jeroboam created two new centers of worship within the borders of Israel in the cities of Bethel and Dan. The focal point of worship at Bethel and Dan were two golden calves he had molded. That way the citizens of Israel could stay within their nation's borders and fulfill their worship obligations. This was, of course, an abomination to the Lord.

Fast forward 150 years to the time of Amos. Another Jeroboam was ruling. Economically speaking, times were good for Israel. The nation had become saturated with wealth, materialism, luxury and apathy. The high priest of Israel with their false calf-worship was Amaziah. Amos was originally a citizen of Judah, but had been called by God to preach in Israel—so now you can see things will get interesting! Listen again to Amos chapter 7: *Then Amaziah the priest of Bethel sent a message to Jeroboam king of Israel: "Amos is raising a conspiracy against you in the very heart of Israel. The land cannot bear all his words."*

Notice that? The land cannot bear all his words? Amos hadn't lifted a sword or a bow. He hadn't trained like a terrorist in some para-military camp. He hadn't organized rebels. All Amos had done was preach. It was just words. Yet Amaziah reported to the king, "The land cannot bear all his words."

When God's words are spoken there is power behind them. His words may strike fear. They may comfort and soothe. They may empower and embolden. What message did Amos preach from God? *Jeroboam will die by the sword, and Israel will surely go into exile, away from their native land.* No wonder Amaziah the priest thought Amos' words were conspiratorial! Surely, that message was not patriotic. Had Amos been a citizen of Israel he could have been accused of treason. If citizens listened to Amos it would not be good for national morale. They may become alarmed and start to look at King Jeroboam with suspicion and wonder what sort of path Jeroboam was leading them down.

There's something deeper to this. When God's word is preached, it has a way of generating faith in people's hearts. Faith and then loyalty to God. An unbelieving king would feel threatened by a people's loyalty to God. In fact, all godless governments have been paranoid about the Christian Church throughout history for this very reason.

It's important to point out that none of this was Amos' idea. He had not volunteered for this job. Nor had he conjured up this message. Listen again to Amos chapter 7: *Then Amaziah said to Amos, "Get out, you seer! Go back to the land of Judah. Earn your*

*bread there and do your prophesying there. Don't prophesy anymore at Bethel, because this is the king's sanctuary and the temple of the kingdom." Amos answered Amaziah, "I was neither a prophet nor a prophet's son, but I was a shepherd, and I also took care of sycamore-fig trees. But the LORD took me from tending the flock and said to me, 'Go, prophesy to my people Israel.'"*

It is important to know that just like Amos your pastors and teachers at Peace did not appoint themselves to their roles. They were called here by Christ through the Church. Nor do they produce their own words. They are called to preach and teach God's Word from the Scriptures. They are not pursuing a career. They are serving in the ministry. The ministry is not theirs to do with as they please. The ministry does not belong to them. It belongs to Christ.

Sometimes that means being faithful like Amos, even when a situation is not easy. The main reason a Lutheran school exists is that we love what's taught here. We love it so much that we want it to be inculcated in the hearts and minds of our children on a daily basis. Over the years I've often said to our teachers that if folks from other religious circles are completely comfortable to use our school, it is possible we are not doing our job. Not that we harbor any desire to agitate. And most certainly we embrace the opportunity to propagate God's truth. But the truth of Scripture also has a way of agitating, even as Amos' message stirred things up because of the power of the Holy Spirit. And our job is not to accommodate those who disagree, but to be faithful to what God says. He has only given us words, but they are God's words.

But why did God have Amos preach such trouble-causing words to the people of Israel? In addition, he preached even more dreadful words specifically to Amaziah as the CEO of Israel's church. Why? Not because God is cruel or vindictive. Just the opposite. God loved the people of Israel and wanted to save them. Even then, as the nation was on the brink of imminent collapse, God was reaching out to them in a last, ditch effort. Perhaps in the midst of their upheaval and turmoil they might yet turn to the Lord for salvation. Their golden calves had done nothing for them. Perhaps it might occur to them that it was the Lord who warned them of what was coming and therefore it is also the Lord who was there yet to save them in their distress.

For you see, our God is a God of second chances. It was this God and not their golden calves who promised to send a Messiah to atone for all their sins. In the very hymnal God had given Israel for their worship at the temple, the book of Psalms, God says, *The LORD does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities.* He also says, *If you, O LORD, kept a record of sins, O LORD, who could stand? But with you*

*there is forgiveness; therefore you are feared.* This God made good on His promise and sent His Son Jesus to atone for our sins by His death on the cross. Jesus said of Himself, *But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.*

These are just words, aren't they? But not just words. These are words that change everything. These are life-giving words. These are eternally-saving words. These are healing, restorative words that put us back on good terms with God. These are words that instantly transform all suffering from mere punishment into blessing, words that transform us from objects of God's anger into His dearly loved children. These are not just words. They are God's words. They are the words with which God has equipped your called ministers... to serve you.