

Sacristy of San Marco in the Basilica of the Santa Casa in Loreto, Melozzo da Forlì (1438-1494)

Greetings!

Please read [Amos 7:7-15](#)

Over the years, I have been interested in prophetic literature from the Bible. Amos ranks as one of my favorites. Since this lesson came up in the lectionary for this week, I thought I would spend some time reacquainting myself with the prophet and this text.

Amos was an 8th century BCE prophet who preached in both the Southern Kingdom – Judah, under the leadership of King Uzziah and the Northern Kingdom – Israel, under the leadership of King Jeroboam II.

In his ministry he is known for a few important things. One is that he foresaw a nation that would be so weighed down by corruption and injustice that it would rot from the inside out making the people vulnerable to personal and corporate destruction. In this instance he is talking about the northern kingdom, however, Amos preached a similar message in the south. Second, as a preacher Amos is filled with incredible imagery in his preaching style and prophetic work.

- *Does a lion roar in the thicket when it has no prey? Does it growl in its den when it has caught nothing?* Amos 3:4
- *But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!* Amos 5:24
- *"The days are coming," declares the Sovereign LORD, "when I will send a famine through the land – not a famine of food or a thirst for water, but a famine of hearing the words of the LORD."* Amos 8:11
- *And the LORD asked me, "What do you see, Amos?" "A plumb line," I replied. Then the Lord said, "Look, I am setting a plumb line among my people Israel; I will spare them no longer."* Amos 7:8

Amos was a farmer and shepherd from Tekoa, now a ruin, about a dozen or so

miles from Jerusalem. He is credited with predicting the invasion of the Assyrians in 722 BCE. In both instances, Amos is thought to have had a very short career. Amos was under the threat of harm and at the end of the book his whereabouts are unknown. Amos preaches at Bethel, which sets off a firestorm. He is under threat after this point and returns to the Southern Kingdom. In that moment it appears that his public preaching days are over, and he takes to writing instead. The tradition is that Amos was killed by the son of the Priest Amaziah near his home country and is buried in that region.¹

Amos believed in the Sovereignty of God's power and might. So much so that Amos proclaimed the absolute adherence to the practice of Justice. Deep in his theology God gave this message to Amos to proclaim, no more so than in today's passage about the plumb line.



Plumb Line, canstockphoto.com

The imagery of the plumb line reminds us of the use of this device as a building tool. When we were on work trips so many years ago with our youth, we trained the kids on the use of the plumb line. Its purpose is to "true up" a perpendicular timber (usually in our case) so a wall could be constructed safely and be plumb on all angles and sides. If you are off even a quarter of an inch at the sill plate (the bottom attached to the foundation) it might be several inches off at the top of the wall. Plumb, square and true are important building concepts. These three elements must be maintained for structural integrity.

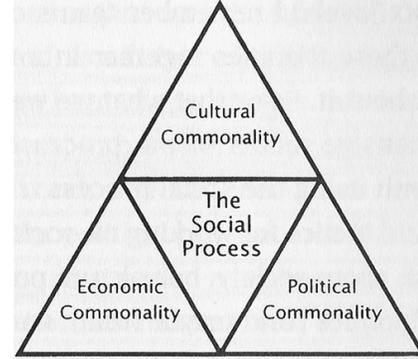
The recent tragedy at the Champlain Towers in Surfside, FL is a horrific example of the failure of structural integrity. Plumb, square and true were not maintained and the building collapsed. Almost one hundred people are missing. As of this writing 46 are dead. Destruction done to the accumulation of life, art, clothing, pets, furnishings, and other personal belongings is devastating. Both the dead and those presumed buried alive in the tower met the failure of the integrity of the plumb line. While we have this true-life example in the news today, there are other applicable places for this notion found in the depth of a prophet's voice and pen.

Years ago I was reminded of the concept of plumb, square and true during a training through the Institute of Cultural Affairs in Chicago, IL. In her wonderful book, Winning Through Participation, Laura Spencer, also a leader in the ICA, wrote about these concepts in what is known as the Social Process Triangle.

The Social Process Triangle is an idea regarding the processes of society. Centered around the **economic**, **cultural**, and **political** realms, the three triangles within the larger societal triangle seek balance. Norms and ways of being are important for this balance. However, balance is a rare occurrence. Triangles will become strong and attempt and

sometimes succeed in over taking the other triangles and becoming a tyrant over them.

Significant time is spent with each triangle trying to restore balance by policing the other triangles towards balance, but this is usually temporary. The search for hope or justice is not only central in the work of Amos but can be understood here by thinking how this idea helps us grasp the human condition. The forces that always prefer imbalance seek advantage in profit, marginalization, and power. While the social processes may be working to restore balance and bring justice, sometimes the best you can do is to be a prophet calling out the abuses we have on hand.



In the case of the Prophet Amos, he rightly identified “justice” as the remedy to a culture that was self-centered and corrupt. Only a restoration which begins with confession and repentance would do what an unbalanced individual or corporate life could not. Can we hear the prophet’s voice in our own generation? And as believers, do we trust that God gets the last word so that “*...justice will roll on like a river and righteousness like a never-failing stream*”?

Conversation:

- What tool do you use to measure your life so that it is in alignment with God’s?
- In what ways are you speaking out against injustice?
- How will your spiritual skill set be passed on to the next generation?
- How do you repent and confess when your “social process triangle” is out of balance and the plumb line to God is not in alignment?
- In what ways will you mentor another, to come alongside setting a relationship, as in Amos 7:8 “I will never again pass them by”?

¹ Anderson Francis, I., and David Noel Freedman, Amos, The Anchor Bible, vol. 24A, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2008 p. 24.

Peace,

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