

Ninth Sunday after Pentecost
July 15, 2018

Text Amos 7:7-15

Theme: "Plumb Line or Zip Line?"

I have here a plumb line. I used the same figure six years ago on this same text, six years to the day actually. A plumb line is a tool for proper alignment, vertical alignment. There is a straight line from the center of gravity of this object to the center of the earth. And you just thought it was a nut on a string.

Now I have another line, one that I did not have six years ago. It's more fun. It's a zip line. Now, I've never done a zip line. It's not been a big ambition of mine, though I don't have many big ambitions when it comes to such things. If I had the opportunity I would probably do it. But back to this one. I need to unspool the line and get it into position. I'll tighten it up a bit. Now I need a volunteer to zip down the line. I think we are all too big. I have just the someone here to fit the bill. It is Sir Terrance Tater, or Starchy for short (and he is pretty short). I need to get him in the zipping position. It's nice to have detachable arms to do this. Actually these are not his own arms. They are borrowed. See, his are very stubby. So his friend lent him a hand and the arm came with it. So we put him on and away he goes. Wee, look at him go. The landing's a little rough. Yes, give the zip line over the plumb line.

There was some pretty zippy days happening in Israel. It looked like many had it going on when it came to high living. The days of Jeroboam son of Joash were glory days. Land that had previously been lost to foreign powers, like Syria, to the north and the east had been taken back. It was also a time of reclamation in the south for Judah. So Judah and Israel put together controlled a territory that rivaled the glory days of David and

Solomon. Security from without was a time for growing prosperity within. For some it really was the lap of luxury. Some had houses of stone and ivory (3:15). Amos speaks of those drinking wine by the bowlful on beds of ivory while singing idle songs and composing new ones and anointing themselves with the finest oils (6:4-6). Certain women, whom Amos refers to as “cows of Bashan” were calling to their husbands to bring more wine (4:1). Yes, many were zip-a-dee-doo-dahhing along.

How is it for us? Most of the luxurious living of the days of Amos would seem pretty rough in comparisons to the creature comforts we enjoy. It's not the comforts are wrong, it is a matter of how those comforts are acquired and one's attitude toward them. Do they come on the backs of others? Are they looked upon as the goal or purpose of life as though they were even gods? So we're on the zip line of life and what does tomorrow bring? It is assumed it will be even zippier or are there no worries for tomorrow, only a matter of eating, drinking, and being merry today?

There was attitude in Israel of the glory days continuing, even becoming more glorious. It was a good age, a silver age, but maybe the golden age was just around the corner. Some looked to a coming Day of the Lord that would be even better.

But then that plumb line putting the damper on the zip line. Why did that sheep herder and tree tender from Tekoa down in Judah have to show up? Why does that law level always seem to be close at hand, even internal in the conscience? And then there is that more reliable and maybe more troubling plumb line of the commandments. All this can be looked upon as an unwanted intrusion.

The cry in Israel could have been WWJ. “We want Jonah!” Why Jonah? We know Jonah as the reluctant prophet who tries to go west when he was called to go east. He was from Israel. We learn in 2 Kings 14:25, Jeroboam restored the territory of Israel according

to the word of Jonah, son of Amittai, the prophet who was from Gath-heper. Yes, WWJ. Jonah probably would have liked that too, the prophet who preached a message to the Ninevites which he hoped they would not believe. Yes, we need a real prophet here in Bethel, one of our own, not this spoil sport from Judah.

No bad news, give me that good time religion. Amaziah tries to have a heart to heart with Amos. He tells Amos Bethel is the king's sanctuary and the temple of the kingdom. It has been the king's sanctuary for a long time ever since the first King Jeroboam of Israel about 150 years earlier. He had set up a golden calf there along with another one in the north in Dan and said, "Behold your gods, O Israel, who brought you out of the land of Egypt." (1 Kings 12:28) It was busy place with feast, solemn assemblies, offerings, singing and melodies (Amos 5:21-23). People came to religiously do their duty though their hearts may not have been in it (8:6). Some cried out for the time of the Sabbath and new moon to be over so they could go back to business as usual, the selling of wheat and grain (dishonestly with faulty scales) and buying the poor for a pair of sandals. They were ready to get back to the zip line of life they enjoyed. Amos was no help, even in rebellion.

Yes, give me that zip-a-dee-doo-dah religion. We all need a little grease on the zip line of life. Everyone has issues, problems, disappointments. It's good to have a little fall back plan, a little soothing to help us by, tide us over until better days. It's good even to hear of big things like forgiveness. That can be comforting. But don't ask me to change. Don't ask me to respond to the needs of others, maybe even forego some of my wants to minister to them. Don't ask me to align to God's plumb line. Just get that thing away. It wears me out. Maybe it's the line that needs to be tilted to match me. Plumb man, Amos, go back to Judah, we're plumb tired of listening to you.

God's law is the divine plumb line. Amos tells Amaziah he did not have some burning desire to come up and plop it down. No, he was no prophet, but God took him from following to flock for this very work. "The lion has roared; who will not fear? The LORD God has spoken; who can but prophesy?" (Amos 3:8) God says through Amos, "Behold, I am setting a plumb line in the midst of my people Israel; I will never again pass by them." (vs 8—or "pass over them") The plumb line is a line of demarcation. In Egypt the destroyer had passed over Israel while slaying the first born of the Egyptians. Now God would not pass over or by pass Israel; no, He would come in judgment.

Some were looking for the Day of the Lord as the good turning to the better. But Amos tells them the Day of the Lord would mean the crashing down of judgment, nothing zippy about it (Amos 5:18-20). Within a generation of the death of Jeroboam the zip line of Israel would be snapped by the Assyrians, those Assyrians who were did not experience God's judgment earlier because they repented at the words of Jonah. It was just as the sheep herder was saying. It would be a day of darkness, not light.

But there is a zippier life than that of any zip line, one with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. There is a much better sanctuary than Bethel. "But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in haven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant." (Hebrews 12:22-24) This sanctuary is truly the King's sanctuary, the King of kings and the Lord of lords. In this place it will not be the momentary glees of zipping down a line. It will be the eternal joy of the heavenly assembly, the eternal wedding feast of the Lamb, the place of no tears, no sorrow, for there is no sin.

Yes, now there are days that seem more like a bucket line than a zip line, but it is light and momentary in comparison to what awaits. It will happen because God's salvation line. From the purely human perspective that line may appear to be more zig zaggy than zippy. But God is not bound by our perspective, far from it. We read in our epistle lesson, "Blessed by the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be hold and blameless before Him."

(Ephesians 1:3-4)

Salvation comes in the line of David. God says through Amos, "In that day I will raise up the booth of David that is fallen and repair its ruins and rebuilt it as the days of old." (9:11) That day will come because of the sprout from the root of Jesse, Jesus of Nazareth. He is the one who caused Herod some uneasiness thinking that it was John whom he had beheaded raised from the dead. But Herod was dead wrong. This was the greater one John had spoken off. His life aligned with the plumb line of righteousness perfectly. Then He gave His life in sacrifice, that horrible sacrifice on the cross, for all our iniquity. The man Herod thought had already been raised from the dead would be raised from the dead, but yet He was not the man Herod thought he was, more than a man, God eternal.

He is the firstborn of those who are raised. He comes again for that final day of the Lord. That day will be the resurrection of all flesh, the righteous to eternal bliss, and the unrighteous to the worst death of the lake of fire. This is what God has revealed to us. We read in our epistle lesson, "In Him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the Gospel of your salvation, and believed in Him, were sealed with the

promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of His glory.” (Ephesians 1:13, 14) The Holy Spirit is working in God’s Word. We have the promise of the pouring out of the Holy Spirit at baptism. The Spirit gives us the faith to hold on to the salvation of Jesus.

In Jesus we are realigned. We go from those were enemies of God to members of His household. We have a new purpose, from a zip line of the desires of the flesh to life line, abundant life line, of new creations. We are remade to serve God and one another. Here we align to God’s alignment, not try to adjust God’s to our sinful leaning. Brothers and sister, this realigned life is a wonderful life, certainly more joy, more enduring, more meaningful than any zip line. It’s the very thing we were created for. For Jesus’ sake.

Amen