

“What Do You See?”
 Amos 7:7-15; 5:22-24
 Rev. David Hutchinson
 Sunday, July 14, 2019

Do you ever wish you could predict the future?

I have...more times than once.

I've wished:

That I could know the final score before the game was over...

That I knew the outcome of someone's hospital stay...

That I knew when...and if...and how...

Wished I had known ***dad*** was going to die so I could call one last time.

And...probably just as often...I've been glad I didn't know.

Glad I didn't know - - years earlier - - when and how ***mom*** would die.

Glad I didn't get my wish...

I'm glad I didn't know for certain...the minute I met Nancy...

...how it would all go...it would have ruined the excitement!

If I were not a minister...and I had to find another career...I would like to be a TV
 weatherman. / Predicting the weather...is something I love to do.

I even like being **wrong** about the weather sometimes - -

so it would be the perfect career!

But here's the thing about weather forecasts:

Predictions of bad weather don't always make it easier.

Yes sometimes they save lives:

Tornadoes can be avoided - - even with just a little advanced warning.

BUT - - the damage still gets done.

Predictions of hot weather might get you to close your windows and pull the blinds shut for the afternoon to keep the cool air in - - but they don't make it easier to breathe.

And NOT stepping on the bathroom scale - - won't make your second dessert go away.

And NOT looking in the mirror - - won't make your hair grow back.

And NOT looking at the budget - - won't create more money.

Taking a handicap - - won't make you a better golfer.

And NOT acknowledging our mistakes - - won't help us live a better tomorrow.

However...

Sometimes - - I WOULD be EASIER - - NOT to see...

Which is what Amaziah tries to do, in our Old Testament reading this morning.

Amaziah the high priest - - didn't look - - at what he didn't like.

Amaziah didn't listen - - to the prophet Amos.

I'm a bit of a planner - - as many of you know. And I don't think I'm the only one. And so I like to know how things are going to go. But guess what, it's impossible. And I re-learn that over and over. All you have to do is consider how some people who are sick, older, and nearing the end of their lives, defy the predictions of doctors, as to when they are going to die.

The Oregonian had a story a few years ago about the weather. The title was, "It's the end of the world! No, wait, it's just rain in July". It turns out it's not that uncommon after all - to have rain in July. But we're tantalized by trying to predict the future!

Although - - Sometimes - - I WOULD be EASIER - - NOT to see the future...

Which is what Amaziah tries to do, in our Old Testament reading this morning.

Amaziah the high priest - - didn't look - - at what he didn't like.

Amaziah just would not SEE - - what Amos was trying to show him.

Amos was one of the earliest prophets in the history of Israel. He did his work in the Northern kingdom, which was the one to *fall first*. Forming political alliances with powerful mighty empires - - instead of trusting in God's promises - - brought them down. But they didn't want to deal with their issues - - and neither did their king, Jereboam 2 - - and neither did their high priest Amaziah.

So - - they got mad at Amos.

But killing the messenger - - doesn't change the truth of the message.

But we can understand the impulse to kill the messenger.

Can't we?

We don't like bad news.

So maybe the issue is NOT predictability - - but CLARITY.

I saw a strange REVISION of a quote come across the internet.

I think it was posted on someone's Facebook wall...

It said: "Give me ambiguity, or give me something else."

Perfect, right?

What a comment on our culture.

Instead of the clarity of Patrick Henry, who in his speech at the Virginia convention in 1775, swung the vote for Virginia to enter the Revolutionary War by saying:

"Give me liberty or give me death"

It has come to this...

"Give me ambiguity, or give me something else"

Patrick Henry made NO PREDICTIONS about the outcome of the struggles ahead.

But he WAS clear about where HE stood.

Maybe the best we can hope for in the upcoming election season - - is clarity.

Maybe some people will even take a stand.

Patric Henry took a stand - - and he was clear.

Like Amos was.

Amos was a prophet - - NOT a fortune teller.

A prophet is NOT a predictor - - as much as a truth teller.

And the way OUT of BAD NEWS is NOT always GOOD NEWS.

Sometimes it's HOPE.

Hope is NOT about CONVERTING bad news INTO good news.

Hope is about being CLEAR - - and CHOOSING to live anyway.

Hope is NOT for the good times.

Hope is for the TOUGH times.

Hope is for ALL time.

There is a Native American legend called, "The Seer Who Would Not See". I think it helps us face some things about Amos and his message.

As the legend begins, the "earth-maker" is surveying the earth. And as the "earth-maker" looks around, outside of one of the villages, a "seer" is spotted. A seer is someone who sees the future.

As the seer sits there, a BIRD flies by. The bird, who has sided with evil, flies by and makes a prediction: "There's a terrible STORM coming", says the bird.

"There's no storm" says the seer.

The bird warns of the storm several times...

The bird warns - - and the “seer who would not see” responds, “I know what kind of a bird you are - - you’re evil. So...I won’t listen to you.”

But lo and behold, the great storm arrives.

Everything is washed away.

Only a few survive.

One of the survivors is the SON of the “earth maker”.

The son, and the bird do battle.

And the son - - defeats the bird - - and brings life.

Life to all those who had been killed.

Amos was a seer.

Amos was a prophet.

Amos was a truth teller.

All Amos did was hold up a plum line next to a wall and say,

“Look, the wall is crooked.”

Throwing away the plum line would not have fixed the wall.

And maybe - - so it is for our lives:

Where do we need clarity at Plymouth Church?

Where do you need clarity in your life?

What are WE focused on in our lives?

What are YOU focused on?

Maybe it’s time to bring in a few things from your peripheral vision.

Maybe it’s time for some focus...

And if it is - - what would that look like for you?

Think what it's like to really focus:

Someone praying - - with eyes closed - - but heart open...

A story is told about Leonardo Da Vinci painting the Last Supper. Supposedly someone admired his work while it was still unfinished. They commented on how beautiful it was.

"Especially", they said, "the communion chalice". It's like I could reach out and grab it. It's what FIRST caught my eye.

Immediately Da Vinci blotted it out.

The focus, he said, should NOT be on a pretty cup, but on Christ.

So where is our focus?

If we hold a plum line up next to ourselves...

...how do we measure up?

WHATEVER the answer...

...the next step is the SAME.

WHATEVER the answer...crooked or straight...

...beautiful or a complete shambles...

...the next step is the SAME:

Hold up the plum line...be as honest as we can...

...and THEN...with our focus fixed on Christ...

...let us live - - in HOPE. / This IS about hope!

And - - HOPE is NOT about CONVERTING bad news INTO good news.

Hope is about being CLEAR - - and CHOOSING to live anyway.

Hope is NOT for the happy - - easy times.

Hope is for the TOUGH times.

Hope - - truly - - is for ALL time.

Listen to how Amos proclaims HOPE in the MIDST of judgment.

This is to people who just want to END of the world to come.

Sometimes called the “Day of the Lord” in the Old Testament,

it was a day of destruction:

[read Amos 5:14-24]