

May I speak in the name of God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Well, at least it was a good gospel reading that we've now heard two weeks in a row. I don't know how that happened. But if you were here last week, you'll only have heard that gospel for the first time. But also, you'll know that for these few weeks I'm talking about the minor prophets, Amos and Hosea. And so we're focusing today on the Old Testament reading from the Prophet Amos. And if you were here last week, you'll also perhaps notice echoes of last week's reading, the same things emerging in the reading set for this week.

Amos was a man on a mission and a man with a message, and it wasn't a particularly bright and uplifting message that he was called to preach. Amos really is the stereotypical prophet. He does actually say at one point, "Behold, the end is nigh." He was called by God to deliver an uncomfortable message of judgment on the people of Israel. And this passage from chapter eight that we've heard read is just typical of the kind of things he said and the message that he came to bring. And the key question for me is at the beginning of the passage where God says to Amos, "Amos, what do you see?" And God's call on Amos was to see things from a divine perspective because the way that God looks at things isn't the way that we look at things. And Amos was about to learn that lesson.

So, God shows Amos of basket of summer fruit and then says to Amos, "What do you see?" And Amos says, "A basket of summer fruit." So, no surprise there, then. What is perhaps surprising is that God goes on to tell Amos that, "The end has come upon my people Israel." And what, you might ask, has that got to do with a basket of summer fruit? Well, it turns out there's a wordplay going on here, which of course in our English translations we completely miss. But the Hebrew word for summer fruit sounds very similar to the Hebrew word for an end. And of course that gets lost on us. It's lost in translation. But we can get the point that two people could look at the same thing and see very different things, and I'm sure we've all seen that optical illusion of the duck and the rabbit where some people look at it and see a duck. Some people look at it and see a rabbit, when they're looking at the same thing. Or the one, there's another famous one of an old lady and a young lady where some people look and they see an older person; some see a younger person.

We can look at things, the same thing, and see something different. It says in 2 Chronicles that "the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole creation." God looks at his creation, but doesn't necessarily see what we see. There's a great example of that in the Old Testament where you might remember Samuel the prophet is tasked with going to find a king. He starts looking through the people of Israel and he comes to the House of Benjamin, and all the sons are paraded in front of Samuel. All these big, hunky looking young men all look very regal. And Samuel says, "No, that's not the new king. No, that's not the new king." And they say, "Well, there's nobody left, apart from David." And so Samuel says, "Well, let me have a look at David." Well, David's the youngster out in the fields. He comes in. Straight away, Samuel says, "That's the one that God chooses."

And the reason you might remember, it says, "Man looks at the outside appearance, but God looks on the heart." The way that God looked at David was different to how everybody else looked at David. To most people, David looked like a rather insignificant young man, but Samuel saw through God's eyes and discerned him to be a future king. My favorite film is *The Third Man*. I don't know if anybody here has seen it. An absolutely wonderful film and there's a great scene in there. It's a very old film, by the way. There's a great scene in there where the anti-hero, Harry Lime, played beautifully by Orson Welles, he goes up in this big Ferris wheel and he tries to explain to his former friend how he's been able to sell contaminated drugs and made a lot of money, whilst a lot of people have become very ill.

They get to the top of the wheel and Lime looks out the window and says to his ex-friend, "What do you see?" And the friend says, "Well, I see lots of people running around down there." And Harry Lime says, "Oh, no, don't you think they look like ants?" And what that shows is just how twisted Harry Lime has become. Because when he looks from the top of the Ferris wheel, he doesn't see people; he sees ants. And because of that twisted way of seeing, he's been able to carry on with his barbarous activity.

A more positive way of looking, it's been on the news this week, the 50th of the lunar landings has led to all that talk of space. And I've been interested to read about the astronauts and there's only been 556 of them or whatever, very few number have had that amazing vantage point of looking back down on earth from

space. And many of them have talked about how they've been changed by that view. They've been changed by what they've seen. And there's a phrase for this; it's called the overview effect, and that's the mental shift that happens when an astronaut sees the earth from space and sees it as part of a larger hole, and look in a way that they've never looked before.

So here's an example from Nicole Scott, a Floridian astronaut. "I do remember initially looking out of the window of the spacecraft the first couple of days, wanting to see my home, wanting to see Florida from space. Finally, we were flying over Florida. I wanted to fly to the window and see it, and then realized somewhere down the line that I wasn't looking at Florida the same way anymore. I still wanted to see Florida, but Florida had just become this special part of home, which is Earth. I realized Earth is my home."

What this Old Testament passage is about, what the whole of Amos' message was about was calling on people to look at things differently; get a different viewpoint. Amos wants to bring about an overview effect to the people of Israel, so they start to look at things from a different perspective, from God's perspective. And we can see in this passage three things in particular that he wants them to see differently; three different ways of looking. First, that he wants them to look at their context differently. Do you remember last week I was talking about Amos and how the eighth century B.C. that he lived in was this golden era of great wealth and prosperity? It was an economic boom, an economic miracle. There was peace in the land and the rich were getting richer.

But when Amos looked at the situation, he didn't see a golden age. He saw impending doom. "The end has come upon my people Israel," was his message. And Amos often talks about the coming of a dreadful day when the land of Israel would be overrun and destroyed. And we see that in this passage. "Oh, that day," says the Lord, "I will make the sun go down at noon. That time is surely coming," says the Lord, "when I will send a famine on the land." Whereas Amos' hearers thought everything was fine. God had measured them with his plumb line and they'd come up short. The plumb line had shown them to be off-kilter.

And there are two other things in this vision that recur throughout the book of Amos. The first concerns the worship life of Israel. This was a time, you remember I

said this last week, that the temples and the sanctuaries were booming. There were lots of elaborate rituals and sacrifices and pilgrimages going on. The people throughout the land thought they were doing just what God required. In fact, they thought they were making God very happy by their religious practices, but Amos told them how God looked at their worship. "I hate, I despise your festivals. I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them and the offerings of wellbeing in your fatted animals, I will not look upon them. Take away from me the noise of your songs. I will not listen to the melody of your harps, but let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream."

Amos' mate, Hosea, makes the same point. "For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice. The knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings," which leads to the third area where God saw things differently to the people. Look at what Amos says in that passage. "You trample on the needy and bring to ruin the poor of the land." The people, most of them were enjoying their prosperity. To them, it felt like they'd never had it so good. What they saw as good and clever business, God's saw as the exploitation of the poor. The people said, "We will make the ephah," which is a measuring weight. "We'll make that small and the shekel great." A practice which is all to do with false balances. The rich had rigged the system. They'd found a way of keeping the poor, poor. God looked at their economic system and was mad. He didn't see a great wealth creating economy. He saw injustice and the rich getting richer at the expense of the poor. "Let justice roll down like waters," was the cry.

And of course all this is challenging stuff. It begs the question of what God sees when he looks at us in our context, and Amos prompts us to be always asking the question, what does God see? Are we looking through God's eyes, or do we see things solely from our own perspective?

So, the challenge for us is to seek an overview effect that we might come to share God's way of looking. Now, the good place to start that shift in the way that we see things is to look at the person of Jesus Christ. What do you see when you look at Jesus? Do you see a prophet, a good teacher, even a miracle worker, or do we see Jesus as Saint Paul sees in that amazing reading that we got from the book of Colossians in our epistle?

What Saint Paul sees when he looks at Jesus is this: "the image of the invisible god, the firstborn of all creation. In him, the fullness of God was pleased to dwell. Through him, God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things." That's the starting point. When we make that shift and see Jesus as the New Testament writers see him, we'll be on our way to seeing the world as God sees it.

Amen.