

Straight from the "Hart"

Worship Service from October 24, 2021



Music Standing on the Promises

Music They'll Know We Are Christians by Our Love

Responsive Reading (LR - Lay Reader C – Congregation)

Pastor: [And the Bible book of James tells us how it is important to demonstrate our faith by doing good now while we still can.

LR: We should know better than to say, "Today or tomorrow we will go here or there and do this or that... What do we know about tomorrow?"

C: How can we sure about anything in our lives?

LR: Our lives are the mist of warm breath that appears in the cold and then quickly vanishes. Therefore, if today, we know of an opportunity to do a good that we ought to do --

C: -- and we refrain from doing that good deed, it is, for us, a sin.

LR: What good is it to claim we have faith if we don't do anything to demonstrate that faith? This kind of faith cannot save anyone.

C: Faith that does not lead to good action is not a living faith.

LR: You can believe all you want that there is one true God -- that's wonderful. But even demons believe this -- and tremble with fear before him, unchanged. They remain demons.

C: [Therefore, we will] ...yield to the dynamic life and power... and the new-creation life of the Spirit.

LR: Keep in mind that we who belong to Jesus Christ have already experienced crucifixion. For every-thing connected with our [selfish] life was put to death on the cross and crucified with Messiah. But the fruit produced by the Holy Spirit within you is divine love in all its varied expressions:

C: These are the things which the Spirit wants [us] to show: love, joy, peace, patience, being kind, being good.

Inspired by James 4:13-14,17;2:14,17-19 (blended NIV,CEV,TPT) and quoting from Galatians 5:16a,17b, 24-25, 22a (TPT); 22(WE))

Theme And as an example, Mrs. Hippopotamus, Mrs. Crocodile and Mrs. Mosquito were all constantly talking about how *good* their children were. Well, the

community wanted to see how good they were. They decided to have a “good deed day”, so to speak. So, the next day, Hippopotamini, Croco-Dale and Mosquit-Joe set about being as good as they could on that day.

Hippopota-Mini decided to bring water to all the animals in the area who were sick or injured or too weak to get down to the lake to drink. This was really good because they were in the middle of the hot dry season, and they may not have survived until the next rains came.

Croco-Dale spent the day by the lake acting as a lifeguard, and saved many animals from drowning, and they were sincerely grateful (and surprised) to have been saved by a crocodile.

Mosquit-Joe was a tiny animal. All he could do was create a buzz. Therefore, he spent the day talking to everyone he could find -- friends and strangers, monkeys, ants, lions, elephants, snakes, buffalo, scorpions, giraffes and stirred them all up into having a big workday around the area, and many came and had great fun working together and they fixed many problems, and all the local animals were happier.

Today we talk about God’s goodness – in us. As we bring our individual goodness to the group it grows into a lot of goodness....

Special Music Introduction

... Someone once said, “We ought to be kind to everybody, because everybody is having a tough time.” It is (or should be) the heart cry of Christians everywhere -- to be a blessing and help to others through a variety of avenues, just as Paul told the Corinthians: He comforts us every time we have trouble, so that we can comfort others when they have trouble. We can comfort them with the same comfort that God gives us. - 2 Corinthians 1:4 (ICB)

Part of a poem by Charles D. Meigs – which later itself became a hymn, says

“Lord help me live from day to day,
In such a self-forgetful way...
... Let this my motto be,
Help me to live for others,
That I may live like Thee.

(From <https://www.staugustine.com/article/20160415/LIFESTYLE/304159947>)
(<https://library.timelesstruths.org/library/music/O/Others/Others.pdf>)

Just as God called and blessed Abraham so that he would be a blessing to all the nations, God calls and blesses us that we may be a blessing to others. This song prays that this is so in our lives.

Special Music Make Me a Blessing

Prayers And to be that blessing, we ask the Holy Spirit for a fresh experience of his presence, shaping us into what we can become to be a blessing for others. Let's prepare our hearts for prayer by singing.

Prayer Music Spirit of the Living God

Pastor's Lord, We live in a time when we need your Spirit to fall on us in a powerful way. We do trust in your unfailing love. We rejoice with those whose lives, regardless of circumstances, are moving forward relatively confidently and smoothly. We mourn with those whose lives, regardless of circumstances, are struggling to get through their days. We all look to you for answers -- for help, and for guidance and power to give help. We praise you in prayer and song, for you have been good to us. You give light to our lives, and you will not let us be overcome by any dark forces trying to defeat us.

Therefore, enable us to defy corruption and falsehood by committing to truth and integrity; and by praying for honesty and uprightness to increase in our world. Inspire us to defeat apathy and hatred by choosing active love and praying for understanding and peace to increase. Motivate us to overcome skepticism and cynicism by embracing the mystery of faith and by praying for humility and wonder to increase. Persuade us to confront our own self-interest and human arrogance, by celebrating your salvation and by praying for compassion and faith to increase. Galvanize us in support of God's purposes among us as we daily choose to follow Christ, and we continue to pray at all times.

Intercession And today we continue to pray for * Makyla, a 15 year old having a biopsy, * Mike Norman – with covid on hospital ventilator and dialysis, * F/F Nancy Schultz who passed away, * the Bonneville family -- Jennifer and children better, Warren will have chronic breathing issues, * We praise you for Michael Shinkle's daughter in law came through surgery very well. * but for Joy Sanders - pancreatic tumor, * Bill Wycoff – recovering from foot surgery, and * Sheila Daniel - shingles in hand, * we also pray for Linda Oldford's dear friend Choyce Quigley who is fighting for her life due to a rare, just diagnosed infection, and Jan Martin asks that we remember the Munro family as they memorialize Pam Munro today. * We also remember those we hear in the news around the world that are facing challenges, as well as well as those facing situations that may never make the news, or are never spoken out loud, but are just as devastating for those experiencing them. We are grateful that you always remember us in our joys and needs and we know

that ultimately you give us victory as we patiently and consistently live as you taught us to pray. **Lord's Prayer**

Bible Reading Introduction

It was 750 BC. It was the best of days, but the worst of nights were coming. This tension already co-existed within the nation. Those who held the power and wealth and opportunity to make a difference were not investing resources, time or energy in securing the heart of the nation's worship priorities. Nor had they maintained the heart of the nation's ethics. Their wealth was gained "legally", but it was only legal because they controlled the courts through bribery, false witnesses, twisting justice and cheating people, out of their true rights under the law. They confiscated their homes, robbed them of their crops, and even sold them into slavery. They opposed anyone who spoke truth in the courts and challenged their injustices.

They were complacent, yet confident, that God would protect their comfortable lives, blinded to the possibility that anything could disrupt their luxurious living. God calls a layperson, a shepherd named Amos, to go and talk to the nation and warn them about the threat of the Assyrian Empire that had already conquered cities more powerful than theirs, and was expanding in their direction, and they would be the first to be taken from their grand homes and dragged off into slavery. But even more, he warned them of their spiritual peril with words like these:

and Reading Selected verses from Amos 5:4-24

⁴ This is what the Lord says: ⁶ "Turn back to the Eternal One, seek the Lord and you will live. ⁸ The One who made [and] set the Pleiades and Orion in the heavens, who turns night's shadow into dawn and darkens the day with night, ¹² I know how many are your offenses, and I see the gravity of your sins: ¹³ therefore the wise keep quiet in such times, because truly, the times are evil. ¹⁴ Seek good, not evil, so that you may live. Then the Lord God Almighty, the Commander of heavenly armies, will be with you. ¹⁵ Hate what is evil, and love all that is good; apply His laws justly in the courts... Perhaps the Lord God Almighty will have mercy... ²⁴ Here's what I want: Let justice thunder down like a waterfall; let righteousness flow like a mighty river that never runs dry." (NIV and VOICE blended)

Music All Who Love and Serve Your City

Sermon Releasing the Power of Goodness

The words we just sang could have been lifted straight from the prophet Amos himself. People cry out as peace, justice, honor and love evaporate, replaced by

increasing coercion, stress, scandal, and sorrow. Meanwhile, those with wealth and power, those who *could* do something – ignore the growing unrest within the nation as well as the external threat beyond its borders. They waste away their days of ease, fantasizing that *their* good days would never end, presuming on the protection of the Lord.

It may have been during the glorious splendor of a national religious festival. A festival when renewed and instilled confidence in the people as they gather from all around with offerings and singing praises to God for his sustaining goodness to them, and about how he calls out the stars by name and brings light to dark. Why wouldn't they celebrate? They lived in a cultural mindset where wealth and prosperity *proved* beyond a shadow of a doubt that God was on their side, that he approved of them, and therefore, they felt that their wealth made them untouchable.

It may have been a festival like this to which Amos came and sang a funeral lament, (turning the festival all upside down) eulogizing and mourning all the bad choices that would inevitably lead to a premature death of the nation. He warns them that the God who brings light to the darkness also bring darkness to light and all their plentiful parties would come to a sudden end, and that those who became rich and powerful at the expense of others would very soon experience others enjoying power and wealth at their expense. They would be removed from the houses they have unfairly gained, unable to eat or drink from the rich fertile fields which they had stolen. The grieving would be so widespread that they'd have to go out to the countryside to recruit enough professional mourners to grieve the loss and destruction.

These people, fooled by their material security, thought they were celebrating an "A" grade, thought they were doing a good job and experiencing excellence and success, were now confronted by a prophet telling them they were failing and about to be fired for their poor performance.

I don't know if it was in the head of Jesus as he told the sotry – but when he was confronted by a greedy son wanting Jesus to save his -- *inheritance*, Jesus warned not only him but the whole crowd that was there, "Watch out! Guard yourselves from every kind of greed; because your true life is not made up of the things you own, no matter how rich you may be." Then Jesus told a parable that is a near perfect description of the days of Amos. A rich man had land which yielded good crops. He thought "I don't have a place to keep them all. I know, I'll tear down my

barns and build bigger ones to hold it all. Then I will say to myself how lucky I am because I have everything I will need for many years. I can take it easy, drink, and enjoy myself.” And God told the man he was foolish because everything he collected would be lost to him because he himself wouldn’t last the night.” Jesus concluded that this is how it is for people who pile up riches [only] for themselves [in this world] but are not rich in God’s sight. (Luke 12:15ff)

This is the first motivation for goodness. Acting with goodness *tends* to avoid the consequences of bad choices and wrong behavior. In

<p>Motivation for Goodness (MfG) Avoid Consequences</p>

some faiths and in popular language, it is called karma. In our language, it is called reaping what you sow. As a *general* rule, (there may be exceptions, but as a general rule) if you plant seeds of dishonesty, injustice, and unrighteousness, and violence, like any crop, it may take some time, but eventually, that is what will grow up all around you. Therefore, if you want good to come to you, then you must plant integrity, fairness, forgiveness, peace; that is, plant goodness around you.

It seems these ancient people voiced the words of reliance on God’s goodness and mercy at their festivals, and that’s a good thing, (if they were sincere) but their reliance on God did not extend to transforming them into a good people, but rather relied on God’s goodness to excuse themselves from then having to be good. Morality and ethics became irrelevant. To put it in our modern context, the attitude seems to have been, “As long as I observe Sunday morning well, what I do the rest of the week is irrelevant”. To keep the question framed in our agricultural metaphor -- if I plant one good seed on Sunday morning, and six bad seeds the rest of the week, what kind of a crop will I eventually get?

A habitual lifestyle of sin, (of non-goodness) cannot be offset by a good-feeling festival or worship service. In essence, Amos said, if our norm is to practice evil Monday through Saturday, then Sunday is irrelevant. God would prefer that we take the empty noise and songs away. Doing right was and is more important than performing rites. God wants justice more than jubilation, meaning more than motions, worship more than rote, heart more than form, good deeds more than feeling good... That’s not that the latter are wrong, or unimportant, but they don’t work if the first part is absent. But these people justified themselves and even blamed the ones they victimized for their woundedness and poverty that they had put on to them...

Ruth Walsh explains it with these (very slightly adapted) words:

I was naked, and you questioned
 my lack of modesty ~~in appearance~~.
 I was imprisoned, and you debated
 the legal aspects of [advocacy] ~~interference~~.
 I was penniless, and you discussed
 tax-deductible donations from your wealth.
 I was sick, and you thanked the Lord
 for the blessings of your health.
 I was hungry, and you formed a club
 to study malnutrition.
 I was homeless, and you said
 God's love was [my] shelter under any condition.
 I was lonely, and you left me by myself
 while you and your friends prayed.
 You seem so holy and close to God.
 Yet I'm still sick and alone and afraid!

As God's people, our primary motivation to be good and do good is because God is good and demonstrates merciful goodness to us through Christ, and now, he calls

**MfG: God's Merciful
 Goodness to us**

us to allow his goodness to flow through us to others like a never-ending stream of life-giving water to those who are thirsty for help -- to be a blessing for our world.

Amos gives us several calls to action in the words that we read that will help make us a blessing for others. First, if we are going to provide life giving

**Calls to Action (CtA)
 Seek the Lord and Live**

water, we have to have the life-giving water of God's Spirit within us. Amos pleads with them to not think that their ill-gotten wealth will secure their life and make them happy and whole. Instead, they should seek the Lord, for only he can provide true life. By definition, when we seek him, we seek good, because God is good. There is a popular phrase going around in Christian circles not all that long ago. Some churches hang onto it even yet. I don't know if you came across it in your circles. The leader says "God is good" and the people say "All the time" then the leader says "All the time." and the people say "God is good." Let's try that: God is good.

All the time. All the time. God is good.

It isn't necessarily obvious in the English translation, but for an even stronger emphasis, Amos interrupts his song of lament and pleads in prose. It was already too late for the nation, but perhaps, if they start doing good and not evil, it *may* not be too late for the refugees

**CtA: Seek good
 and not evil**

to recreate the nation after their consequences conclude. God may yet raise the nation from the grave and allow it to live again.

To seek the Lord and to seek good and not evil raises the question, “What is good?” In modern common language, the meaning changes shape

**What is Good? (WiG)
Righteousness and Justice**

as we grow from babies to children to adults. The first time we hear, we don’t really hear, adults say it about us, “They are good babies, they sleep through the night.” and then it develops to “They are not fussy” to “They cooperate, they are compliant, They don’t have temper tantrums”, they are good toddlers. Then this develops into being obedient, polite, and respectful, to achieving certain goals the parents have in mind, to achieving certain goals that the now grown children have in mind. You see how it transforms as we get older and older?

Steven Covey says our culture tends to define goodness by what it values most, regardless of what that value is. That is how many define “good.” And we erroneously think that just because we value something the most, if we obtain it, we’ve obtained goodness and the quality of our life will be enhanced. We think, “Goodness, I’ll be happier and more fulfilled if I can move to this new place, or I can get this different job, or if people will recognize my talent, or when I ... [get this, do that -- or fill in the goal]. It gets us envisioning success, and setting goals, and climbing ladders, and that is all good – but without really understanding [what is truly good and truly important]”. Thus, we get the ladder all lined up and we climb up all those steps and when we finally get to the top, we realize we’ve leaned it the ladder against the wrong building – we’ve chased after all the wrong things. What we got wasn’t important at all. As you’ve heard in a prior series, Covey called (getting the ladder against the right building) valuing the right things true north. I call it pursuing God’s will.

Another challenge in our society, just as it was for those people in Amos’ day, is that we’ve redefined goodness to mean being good at something and believing that *what we are good at* will make up for any lacks of *goodness* that we have. So athletes and stars and politicians get away with murder (usually figuratively, not always) off the field or screen or office because they are so good or powerful at whatever is their talent or position in the office, on the screen, or field.

The wealthy and powerful in the days of Amos, and in the days of Jesus, and probably and at least some circles of people throughout all of history, felt they could live above the law and get away with injustice because they were so good at

making money (even if it was at the expense of others). Between attending religious festivals and their overflowing barns, they believed that there could be no viable threat to them from inside the city or outside the nation.

But Amos put it this way: It will be like running from a lion only to run into a bear, or hiding by ducking into a home only to be bitten by a snake. If they think they can escape the Assyrians, they will run into God. When the time comes, there will be no escape for they had -- (to translate it literally) -- thrown justice up and righteousness down and marched between them without doing either. For the sake of material things and personal comfort, they oppressed their own people. And that is hate -- it can't really be called anything else. And that is contrary to God's will, and to righteousness and to justice. In the Old Testament, those two words, righteousness, and justice, were often used to sum up the covenant agreement between God and his people, which were streamlined even more in the New Testament as the two greatest commands of loving God and loving others upon which all the law and prophets were fulfilled. (Matthew 7:12, 22:40)

Usually, we think of being good as refraining from being bad. right? "If I didn't do that wrong thing, then I am good." Therefore, our focus is drawn to avoiding those sins of commission, of actively avoiding committing (doing) something wrong. And that is a good thing. But restraining is not enough. Biblical goodness goes beyond avoiding evil. It includes what James was emphasizing in our responsive reading and what theologians call sins of omission, of omitting, of failing to do, something beneficial that we know we should do and ought to do and have the power to do, but choose not to do. (James 4:17, 2:14-17)

WiG Restraining is not enough

God's compassion moves us to take the initiative to see that rightness is achieved in our lives and in the lives of others. It wasn't enough for the people of Amos day to personally avoid cheating others, he told those that had the ability to make a difference to ensure that justice prevails for all people.

When Jesus asked about how to fulfill justice and righteousness - how to fulfill the law - he answered, love

WiG: Good Samaritan

God with all we are and our neighbor as ourselves, and then the questioner, trying to justify himself, asked "Who is our neighbor?" (Luke 10:25-37) and Jesus told the story about a man who went on a journey and was beaten, and robbed, and left on the side of the road to die. Two traditionally "good" people, and I probably shouldn't put the quotes around it, they probably were good people, by their definition (and

most of our definitions). They walked by, they did no evil, they didn't hurt him more -- but they did no *good* for this person in need. Then the racial religious enemy came along and helped. And because he did everything in his power to restore life to the hurting, he was the neighbor, the one through whom God's goodness flowed.

Years ago, medical missionary Captain Shaw arrived at a leper colony in India. Three men had chains binding their hands and feet, cutting into their diseased flesh. Captain Shaw ordered the guard to unfasten their chains. They told him, "It isn't safe. These men are dangerous criminals as well as lepers!" "I'll be responsible. They're suffering enough." Shaw took the keys and removed the shackles and treated their bleeding ankles and wrists.

Two weeks later Captain Shaw had second thoughts when he had to make an overnight trip and leave his wife and child alone. His wife insisted that she wasn't afraid. He left. The next morning when she went to the front door, she was startled to see the 3 criminals lying on her steps. One calmed her down by explaining, "We know the doctor [was gone]. We stay[ed] here all night so no harm [would] come to you."

When we plant goodness around us, we *tend* to receive goodness. That is not a hard and fast rule, mind you. There could have been a different ending to that story. You can't, and God won't *force* anyone to respond to your seeds of goodness with goodness. But the primary point is, we were, and are, wounded and bound by the con-sequential (the sequential cause and effect chain of events) the consequences of our sins; but God sent Jesus Christ to take away our sins -- upon himself on the cross - and heal our wounds so that we can be free. Not free to -- do whatever -- but free to do be good and to do good for others.

As we consider Amos's warning to those who thought they were untouchable from within and without. Consider the scale by which we ourselves measure security and goodness. Walsh continues her poem:

I counted all my dollars while God counted crosses
 I counted gains while he counted losses;
 I counted worth by the things gained in store;
 But He sized me up by the scars that I bore.

...

I never knew till one day by a grave
 How vain are the things that we spend life to save.
 I did not know till a friend went above
 That richest [are those] who [are] rich in God's love.

Unfortunately, it was too late for those in the day of the prophet. Twenty years later, just as Amos had warned, Assyria laid siege to the northern kingdom and Israel's independence came to an end during that time, and the first wave of exiles taken away were the surviving rulers and leaders – all those who could have but failed to do anything in their time of comfort and ease. Someone compared them to the people on the Titanic – only Amos sees the iceberg and shouts the warning, but they just kept on dancing cheerfully, going through the motions as if nothing was wrong until they were sunk.

What about us? When we have God's power and resources to make a difference, are we complacent with our blessings? or do we believe and act on a calling to responsibly use our gifts, talents and resources to exercise a proactive goodness (a goodness that takes initiative) and go out into our world to make our goodness seen and happen? Amos calls us to an introspection of our souls, and of our lives. In times of light and blessing or in times of dark and cursing, are we going through the motions of happy security, or are we truly seeking the Lord?

Prayer Let's pray. Lord, we could spend a lot of time -- waste a lot of time -- debating about what kind of times we currently live in -- whether our culture has or has not bought into the same deceptive values of that ancient culture, and if so, or how close we are to reaping the consequences; but that isn't really what the point is. The point of the message and the point of our prayer today is to hear the call to faithful goodness, whether we think we live in best of blest times, or in the worst of cursed times, or both at the same time, or anywhere in between. We *do* know there are still plenty of needs, physical and spiritual, and like Jesus before us, we are called to do what we can to help find and offer freedom from sin's captivity and healing from the pains of this world; not only for ourselves, but for all whom the Father loves through Jesus and puts into our path. We ask that you continue to guide us daily in this calling for the sake of your name, Amen.

Our final song prays that like Jesus, we become aware of the needs around us and compassionately serve and share the abundant life that we find in him.

Music Lord, Whose Love in Humble Service

Blessing Now go blessed and renewed by the Holy Spirit. Go with strength and courage to bear the fruit of goodness by always seeking the Lord and his life, so that our lives will be instrumental in transforming and renewing the earth. Amen.