

The Prophet Foretells – Pentecost +6C

Amos 8:1-12, Psalm 52, Colossians 1:15-28, Luke 10:38-42

Good Morning. It feels good to be back home here in Morro Bay. I got very lucky with the weather these past two weeks, with a heat wave in Europe ending just before I got to Poland, and another heat wave just beginning in the Eastern US, just as I jetted away... hither.

My trip was filled with wondrous experiences; sights, sounds, sensations and thought-provoking things to learn. As Amos describes his world, I truly beheld a basket of summer fruit. This was so, not only in the literal sense: from the delicious, juicy red currants and apricots of Eastern Europe, to the peach I had for breakfast yesterday in Western New York's Amish country. There is nothing like a perfect summer peach by a blue lake surrounded by deepest green woods.

The week at Chautauqua with my dear friends was splendid. Pursuant to the lecture theme, Human Longevity (a subject I daresay we are all interested in), we heard a number of talks about the astonishing developments that have allowed people to live, on average, four times as long today as in the 1800's. Four times the amount of life! And we heard about how disparities in income and ethnicity correlate directly to lower life-expectancy and poorer health among the impoverished and people of color here in our own country. As Amos would say, "Hear this, you who trample on the needy and bring to ruin the poor of the land, who buy the poor for silver and sell them the sweepings of the wheat. The songs of your temples shall become wailings in that day, says the Lord God, who will not allow this to pass by."

But there were many other currents of thought and feeling to be savored. My trip began with a party in Washington DC (a non-political party), on the occasion of my parents' wedding anniversary. They were married 70 years ago, when Dad returned from his service as a citizen soldier in Europe and the Pacific. In those days, they called them "Theaters of War," but nobody was playing in them. In Poland, I saw evidence of the unimaginable destruction inflicted on that people, first by

the Nazis, and subsequently by the Soviets. We visited the site of a human killing factory where – as Amos predicts – the dead bodies were many. In a lush forest around the hamlet of Treblinka, a couple of hours east of Warsaw, at least 800,000 lives -- that's every single person in San Francisco -- were simply erased in pursuit of the idea that one group of people is more deserving than another. Can we even imagine such a thing? As Richard Rohr observed in one of his sermons last week, "If you want to go to Heaven without me, it's not Heaven. If I want to go there without you, it's not Heaven. Salvation, like Creation, is a message for all, not some."

I also saw the beauty of a people defiant and resurgent, even after decades of terror and oppression. The culture thrives again, after being subjected to the worst treatment humanity can inflict. And still there are political leaders there who preach isolation and superiority, just the way they do here. When will they ever learn?

"The time is surely coming, says the Lord God, when I will send a famine on the land; not a famine of bread, or a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord. They shall wander from sea to sea, and from north to east; they shall run to and fro, seeking the word of the Lord, but they shall not find it." According to Amos, in those days, the word of the Lord was certainly scarce; now we must ask ourselves continually if it can be heard today.

My first stop was in a town in the North, Olsztyn, where Nicolaus Copernicus (Mikołaj Kopernik) worked as a kind of City Manager for the reigning Duke. On one of the interior walls of the castle, you can see what remains of his gigantic map of the heavens, drawn in stucco in the early sixteenth century. This sight proved to be a sublime and wondrous bookend to my trip, because on the last day of Chautauqua, the day before yesterday, the speaker was Scott Kelly, the astronaut who spent a year in the Space Station with two Soviet colleagues, no small thanks to the pioneer Polish astronomer. Not only did he give us a chronicle of his mission that made Star Wars seem petty by comparison, Kelly's perspective on the human condition and human history was heroic and wise. One of the highlights of their orbiting panorama proved to be

morning passages over the Mediterranean Sea, whose intense contrast with the bright sands of Northern Africa was stunning. Kelly told of the wrenching dismay of seeing such a beautiful sight while, on the same day hearing news of refugees, including children, being turned away and washing up drowned on those very shores.

“Shall not the land tremble on this account, and everyone mourn who lives in it, and all of it rise like the Nile, and be tossed about and sink again, like the Nile of Egypt? Why do you boast, O mighty ones, of mischief done against the innocent all the day long?”

There was no sense of greatness or superiority in the people who spoke to us, Richard Rohr, Scott Kelly, Stacey Abrams, or the others. What they possess, and it is a treasure available to all of us, is a clarity of vision. It is a clarity attained through extraordinary experiences – Kelly in space, Rohr in the Church, Abrams in public service – that have vaulted them into a realm where they can see “the whole picture” as it were. But we can have it by opening our hearts and listening with them.

In Abrams’ case, the experience of defying convention and speaking truth to power by encouraging and enabling tens of thousands of previously disenfranchised Georgians to vote, transformed a political campaign into a turning point in our national history. What we’ve been talking about all these years and failing to accomplish -- one citizen-one vote – suddenly seems more realizable. For a young woman of color to be the first such nominee in any governor’s race ever, and to lose narrowly and only because of ongoing voter suppression, was heartening and inspirational. It is only people like her who justify our sorely-tested belief that ours can ever truly be a government of, by and for the people.

For Scott Kelly, the meaning of “whole picture” is a literal one. It is a vision that transformed a good old boy from Jersey into a wise elder – like Amos -- whom we fail to heed at our peril. “It’s hard to describe the experience of looking down at the planet,” Kelly writes in his memoir. “I feel as if I know the Earth in an intimate way that most people don’t – the coastlines, terrain, mountains and rivers. Sometimes, when I’m looking

out the window, it occurs to me that everything that matters to me, every person who has ever lived or died (besides the six of us), is down there.”

And in Richard Rohr’s case, it is a mystical clarity, the certain awareness that God is in all things and all people. As we can see in our passage from Paul’s letter to the Colossians – the Galoshes, as we called them in Sunday School – “He is the image of the invisible God; in him *all* things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—*all* things have been created through Christ and for Christ. This we proclaim, warning *everyone* and teaching *everyone* in *all* wisdom, so that we may present *everyone* mature in Christ.” Operative words: *All* and *Everyone*.

Or as Rohr put it, “Christ is not Jesus’ last name. Christ is just Reality; God’s face put onto Reality. We are ‘in Christ’ because we are created, not because we practice perfect liturgy or profess perfect dogma. “Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her.”

That better part tells us to make justice for *all* our sacrifice, and to put our trust in such a universal vision of our responsibility. Only then will we be the true followers of a real God.