

## Amos 7:7-15

We've all seen houses and buildings that either are condemned or should be. The windows are broken. The porch has collapsed. The door is hanging from one hinge. The building may be leaning. One good windstorm and the demolition crew will not be needed. At one time the structure was in good condition. It was built with care and with hard work. But over time, and because the property was not properly maintained, it now sits vacant, worthless, uninhabitable, condemned.

We all know people like this; people who are ripe for the Judgment. Their mouths are open sewers. Their eyes are always looking for faults in others. Their hands are always doing the wrong thing. Their feet are always walking away from God. They are condemned even now in this life. They have no use for Jesus and His church. There is no fear of God within them.

In the days of the prophet Amos, such people lived in all the countries surrounding Judah and Israel. There were God's people, and then there were all the people who were living in ways completely opposed to God--all broken, leaning, collapsed structures--worthless and condemned. The words of the prophet Amos in our text for today were not for them. And neither is this sermon. These words are not for the open sinners; for those who couldn't care less about God's Word, His Sacraments, and His house of worship. These words are for you; for you whose lives do not cause others (when looking at how you live) to shudder and to say, "That house will soon collapse...if it's not condemned, it should be." Your lives are structures which appear good to the naked eye.

And that's how God's people appeared in the days of Amos. For the most part they did not resemble their worthless, broken-down, condemned neighbors. So you may be able to well imagine their anger when Amos comes up from Judah to Israel and condemns them with God's Law. "*Get out of here, you prophet,*" they told him, "*Go back to the land of Judah and do your prophesying there!*" Through His prophet, God was holding up a plumb line (a string with a weight tied to the end of it...it's used by builders so that structures are built perfectly vertical when going up), and this plumb line God held up to His people. Their lives were leaning badly away from Him, just like their wicked neighbors. 'You are condemned and you will collapse as a nation,' God spoke through Amos. "*The king will die by the sword and the country will go into exile.*"

That same plumb line is here today. It has not changed. What God expected of His people then, is what He expects of us today. When that plumb line is held up; when I preach God's accusing Law, it's never fun to be sitting in the pew because it shows you that you are no better than the wicked. We like to imagine that our lives are perfectly straight. We're not leaning one way or the other. We're basically pretty good. But God's Law, like a plumb line, shows us our sin. It tells us that we, like all the sinful world, are leaning away from God; that we, too, will collapse and perish; that we are condemned. And woe to any of us who acts like the people of Israel. They told God's prophet to shut up. To leave. To take a call to some other church. And they perished. They did die. They did collapse. They were destroyed and condemned. 'Repent, therefore,' God speaks to you today. Do not act as though you are above the Law; as though you are keeping God's Commandments well enough. Not one of us is vertically straight. Not one of us can stand in the Judgment. Repent, or we like the people of Israel, will perish.

Now listen, God did not send His prophet Amos out of anger. He sent Him because He is merciful. He does not desire the death of the wicked, but wants all people everywhere to repent. Amos was not the last prophet God sent, but Jesus was. And Jesus is the answer to God's plumb line. He did not come, as many believe, to teach us how to measure up to that plumb line. Jesus came to stand next to the

plumb line for you. And He was vertically straight, perfect in every way. But He was condemned by it because He was leaning, weighed down with the burden of your sin. Pontius Pilate could find no fault in Him, but He was sent to the cross anyway because He was declared guilty...by God. Guilty of every fault that lies within us. Guilty of every hurtful word we have said. Guilty of every wrong our hands have done. And so He, like a condemned structure, was hanging, suspended by His hands and feet. The demolition crew of the Roman soldiers watched as He was cut off from the land of the living; watched as He leaned His head down in death; as His lungs collapsed with His last breath.

What does this mean for you? It means that Jesus' cross has become God's plumb line for you. He does not condemn you by the Law. He forgives you through the blood of Christ. No matter how badly your life has been leaning away from Him, God declares you forgiven for the sake of Jesus. Looking at you through His cross, which He does because you are baptized into Christ, God sees you as His holy child. Not a worthless sinner. Not someone who is condemned, or should be. You will stand in the Judgment, not because your life measures up under the Law, but because you stand next to Jesus' cross in your baptismal waters. And there you always stand in grace; in God's mercy toward you.

Now I ask you, since God measures your life, not by the plumb line of the Law, but by the cross of Jesus, how will you measure others? Will you look at their faults? Will you broadcast their sins? Will you judge them with the Law, or will you show kindness and mercy toward them as God has shown toward you? The Bible says that which we use to measure others is what God will use to measure us. If we lay aside the cross of our Savior and pick up the accusing Law, then we have chosen to use the wrong plumb line. No one living can measure up to God. But He forgives you freely for Christ's sake because He is merciful. If you want to find faults in others--faults in your spouse, your children, your parents, faults in your fellow church members, faults in your pastor--you will find them. We're all leaning the wrong way. But so are you. And God has forgiven your neighbor in Christ, and He has forgiven you.

At the top of this church is not the book of the Law; it's the cross of Jesus. That cross is the plumb line we use here in Augusta because it's what God uses to measure us--sinners, yes, but forgiven in Jesus. You now can, and will, because in baptism you are in Christ and He is in you, use that cross of Jesus in your home and with your neighbor. You will, because Christ lives in you, make His cross, His mercy, His forgiveness, your plumb line in your life. Amen.