

LOOKING AGAIN

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2 Samuel 6:1-5, 12b – 19 ~ David brings the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem
Amos 7:7 – 15 ~ **Amos**, a herdsman and dresser of sycamore trees is called by God
Ephesians 1:3 – 14 ~ Paul, from prison, gives the scattered churches in Asia Minor a vision that will unite all things in Christ.

We need to look at David again. He and selected leaders of Israel are bringing the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem. The ark is God's protective presence and promise of prosperity for people of faith. There is music, singing, and dancing.

We look back on David and perceive him to be free in spirit, free in his praise of God. But what David is doing was not normal. It was not appropriate for a leader of his stature to be publicly dancing – especially in a religious ceremony. His exuberance offends some people. David's spouse is offended when she looks from her window and sees him dancing. It seems he is breaking away from tradition.

Sometimes our commitments to new ways of doing things appear inconsistent with the ways things have been done before. As we seek to be people of faith responding to the new things God is doing, we are challenged to discern how to keep God's people together. The radical changes to which God invites us are intended to include others, not to push them away.

We need to look at Amos again. God gives Amos a word of challenge to deliver. God has been measuring Israel like a carpenter using a plumb line measures the straightness of a wall. Amos must announce that the places of worship shall be destroyed, the people carried away, and the king must be put to death. Not a popular change to announce. And the king's advisor, who has already warned the king, instructs Amos to flee to go elsewhere with his prophecies.

Amos is not the normal religious leader. He does not work for the religious institution, nor did his father. Amos tells the king's advisor that his business is not religious. In fact, there is a sense of wistfulness as Amos shares his identity as a farmer. But the words he speaks are directly from God.

Sometimes God's transformation in the world is demonstrated through unexpected people. We get used to trusting the same leaders, but sometimes God goes against what we know to be common sense. We need to remain open to God's actions that seem to come from unusual sources. When we speak with conviction from our faith, we are challenged to discern how to accurately represent God.

The opening to the letter from Ephesians lists blessings for which God is to be praised: God has already blessed us in Christ, we are chosen in Christ, and through Christ we are adopted children of God. These blessings result in forgiveness, wisdom and insight and inheritance according to God's plan for the fullness of creation. Marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit, we are not passive recipients of God's grace, but instructed to praise God for these blessings so that the grace God has given may be known by others.

Sometimes we are so confident in our faith that we take it for granted. We need reminders that the blessings in our lives are not from anything we have done, but are gifts given at God's pleasure. When we praise God for all that has been done on our behalf, we must discern how to share the good news in ways that invite others to accept God's grace. God's blessings bring transformation to all of creation and we are testimony to God's actions.

To be in Christ is to be in a new relationship with all of creation, for the new life, the resurrection of Jesus has transformed the very ways that God relates to the universe. Do we trust the inheritance God has promised more than our weekly, bi-weekly or monthly paychecks, more than our savings accounts, more than our investment packages? Are we able to accept our identity as God's adopted ones as more important than titles that praise our leadership – director, president, chairperson, prophet, minister? Are we prepared to live only on God's grace?

We need to look at the disciples again. Jesus sent them out with a new mission. He instructed them to rely on God for their daily needs: no bag for extras, bread only for today, and without money to provide a security net “just in case we run into trouble.” They were to take with them only those things needed for traveling to a new place: a walking stick and sandals. For support they were sent out in pairs.

Sometimes our faith requires that we leave what is familiar. Even the familiarity of a change of clothes may need to be set aside as we go out to see, share and announce the new things God is doing. We are challenged to discern the essentials for this new ministry. Who are the best companions for this journey of faith?

Jesus warns the disciples that some places will not receive them well. There is no promise of easy living as God's adopted children. There is no promise of prosperity or popularity. How willing are we to accept that this is our identity in Christ, that this our status as those adopted by God because we have a relationship with Christ? The transformations God invited us to be part of will challenge us to new ways of relating to others. We need to look at Jesus again. The new ways he did ministry had a lot of people talking. Some people saw Jesus as the prophet Elijah, expected to announce the new reign of God. Some people saw Jesus as one of the ancient prophets, one who spoke out against social injustices while showing a new way.

There is both power and peril in prophetic ministry. You see prophets don't always make headlines. There are no ticker tape parades for prophets, no academy awards for prophets, or lavish receptions for prophets. Yet prophets have an undeniable authenticity that speaks truth to power and gives hope to the powerless. We are both drawn to and driven away from the good news of prophetic ministry. There is something about a prophetic voice that calls us to our better selves, that disturbs what the world calls normal or good. Ministry that shifts into a prophetic gear moves and creates movement.

Sometimes the new ministries we do will be compared to the ministries of people who came before us. We get the same responses that their ministries brought – both positive and negative. We are called to be transformed as we live in the presence of God – but that does not mean everything will be brand new or unique to us. It does not mean we can go back to the way it used to be. We must discern how to honor our ancestors of faith.

We need to look at ourselves again. Hearing God's call to transformation, being committed to living a new way, seeking to be agents of change and growth – these are the

ways we demonstrate our faith, our relationship with God. How are we being invited to transformation? How is it similar to what God has done before? How might our excitement offend others? In what ways are we accepting others, and in what ways might we be excluding them? What are the essential tools we need for this new ministry? And how will we continue to discern God's way? These are questions of faith. We are invited to look again.