

Sermon for the Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost, Year C  
30.ix.2007, 10:00 ELW Service of the Word  
Amos 6:1a,4-7; Psalm 146; I Timothy 6:6-19; Luke 16:19-31  
Saint James the Apostle Evangelical Lutheran Church / Brogue, Pennsylvania

# J. J.!

Grace to you and peace from Him Who is and Who was  
and Who is to come. ✠ Amen.

**“Alas for those who are at ease in Zion, and for those who  
feel secure on Mount Samaria.”**

**--Amos 6:1a**

**“If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither  
will they be convinced even if someone rises from the  
dead.”**

**--Luke 16:31**

In today’s First Reading, the Prophet Amos tries,  
unsuccessfully, to rouse the Jews and Samaritans out of  
their complacency. They had just ‘dodged a bullet,’ as we  
might say. Eight hundred years before the birth of Christ,  
the Assyrians laid waste the entire northern kingdom of

Israel, 'Joseph' as Amos calls it. The ten Hebrew tribes of that region were either massacred where they fought or lived, or they were marched to death in a genocide that was to be repeated nearly three thousand years later, beginning in 1915 as the Armenian, the Chaldæan and, ironically, the *Assyrian* peoples were marched to death across the Syrian desert by the Ottoman Turks and their Kurdish henchmen.

Amos tries to stir the hearts of those who were *not* touched by this catastrophe, the hearts of those who are sure that the Egyptian Pharaoh would protect them from the Assyrians and from anyone else. The Living God of Israel's, including Judah's covenant of righteousness did not enter much into their equation of security. Whether or not they kept the Covenant, showing justice and mercy toward the weak, including the survivors of the great genocide in the north, did not seem to matter. The Jews

had their Temple and their magnificent city on Mount Zion. The Samaritans had their hill shrines on Mt. Gerizim. They had their security and *they* had not been touched by the Assyrian sword. What did they care for the victims and survivors of a catastrophe that was not their problem? Less than two centuries later they *would* care as a new enemy unafraid of the Egyptians swooped down on them, but no one would be left to care for them. The great Prophets of that time, ordinary but righteous men who did not even like to be called prophets, men such as Amos and Hosea, had tried to tell them, had tried to *warn* them that the Covenant *is* important, more important than anything, but they would *not* listen.

The rich man in the parable Our Lord tells in today's Gospel, a character to whom Christian tradition has assigned the name 'Dives,' personifies the lethargy against

which Amos preached. This man has the results of injustice right on his doorstep, a homeless man so broken or ill that he is apparently unable to work to sustain himself, not even as a slave. Dives had not only the Decalog and the many other Biblical commandments of mercy available to his hearing and understanding, but he had also the Prophets, including the Prophet Amos. He calls out for comfort to Abraham in heaven from the hell to which he has consigned himself by his selfishness, beseeching Abraham to send Lazarus to his brothers still living so that they will change their ways, but Abraham's answer is to continue comforting poor Lazarus in his arms while reminding Dives that, in the Scriptures, the 'Law and the Prophets,' Dives and his brothers too had had ample warning and guidance.

Some who look at the manifest injustices in our world blame God, asking how God could permit such things as child abuse or the oppression of dictatorships or the victimization of the innocent through war, as happens on the streets of every Iraqi town today, or deliberate, planned genocide as happens today in the Horn of Africa in a corner of hell called 'Darfur.' It is not God, but the human decision to banish God from our world that causes such monstrous things to happen, for the living God has spoken from the dawn of time, teaching us to live as one family together in peace, to care for the creation as our common heritage and as the inheritance of our children's children. The living God has spoken in our very own flesh by becoming one of us, *not* turning away the poor, the broken, the sick, and even emptying Himself for love of us, broken and dying on the Cross. When poor Lazarus

continues to die in his hundreds of thousands and millions, it is not that God has not spoken up for him, but that we have silenced the voice of God in us. And yet we *dare* confess the Church's faith in that One who did indeed come back from the dead.

'If they do *not* listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.' But, what if 'they,' what if *we* do? What if we *do* listen?

Our adult Bible class began and, at least for the present, concluded a course of study which many Christian congregations are just beginning across our country and around the world. This was the study Bob and Ann Leffel prepared and presented on the problem of food and hunger, on the Farm Bill and the controversy surrounding it, and on the 'Millenium Goals' of the United Nations to eradicate

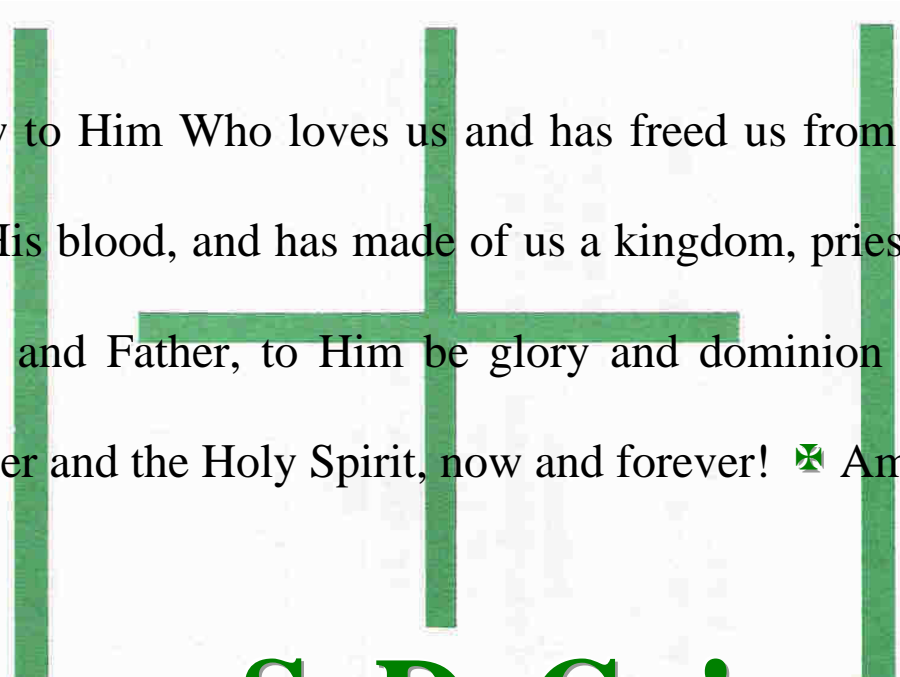
hunger as a pervasive reality on our planet. This forms the basis of a program of study, prayer and action that many congregations are using to support the O-N-E campaign to end hunger and poverty, at least in our society, the richest country on earth.

As I understand it, our adult Bible class entered into the study phase of the course with enthusiasm—though attendance was a little thin the day I taught one of the classes—and I know that they prayed and pray for those who must do without the blessings most of us take for granted. But the *action* phase of letting our governmental leaders know where they ought to be leading on these issues still remains. Perhaps, if more of us would commit to participate, it would be worthwhile to revisit the course on food and hunger, and this time to follow through with

letters written or *presented* to our lawmakers in Harrisburg and Washington.

Let us pray: LORD God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we thank you for the blessings of food, clothing, and shelter, of education and guarantees of public health that we have come to take for granted, but we beseech You, do not hide from us the need of our neighbor, the need of the vast and growing and *overwhelming majority* of our neighbors here and everywhere who do not have what they need from day to day. Strengthen our wills and our voices to speak out on their behalf and grant us the wisdom to accept such changes to our way of life as may be necessary so that every child created in Your image may grow up in hope and in joy before Your face, and that we, being gathered to Your presence at the end of our days, may find

there peace and not judgment, for Jesus' sake and in His  
Name we pray. ✠ Amen.



Now to Him Who loves us and has freed us from our sins  
by His blood, and has made of us a kingdom, priests to His  
God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion with the  
Father and the Holy Spirit, now and forever! ✠ Amen.

**S. D. G. !**