

-If any of you have been to an Our Savior's food event of any kind where there is coffee served, I am sure you have been witness to the many random mugs that are stored in the kitchen. I like to view this collection and pick a different one when I get a mug of coffee at Men's Breakfast every week. There's the "Alaska" mug with a giant eagle on it. There's the "Celebration of Women's Ordination in the ELCA: August 14-16th 1995" mug. There's one of my favorites "God made Grandmas because he likes love" mug. It just so happens when I was writing my sermon this week early in the morning at the church office, I grabbed a mug and made a cup of coffee. I chose to grab this red looking mug that I had never had before in the way back of the cabinet. When I read it, I chuckled because it was extremely fitting that it was in the "back of the cabinet". The mug has written on it: "I'm a Lutheran" with a poem by Garrison Keillor. The poem goes like this: *"I am a Lutheran. We are a modest people, and we never make a fuss. And it sure would be a better world if they were all as modest as us. We do not go for whooping it up, or a lot of yikkety-yak. When we say hello, we avert our eyes and we always sit in the back. We sit in the pew where we always sit, and we do not shout Amen. And if anyone yells or waves their hands, they're not invited back again."*

-Now, I find this poem interesting because obviously it is meant to poke fun at the Scandinavian Lutherans who settled primarily in the northern part of our country. I certainly, in my own personal family heritage, can relate to this sarcastic description of Lutherans and appreciate the continual material that Garrison Keillor puts out in relation to Minnesota and Lutherans. Certainly Lutheranism within the United States in the last 150 years has come out of very "salt of the earth" and "modest" roots. That's what makes this poem so funny.

-I wonder in the next 150 years what the Garrison Keillor of the future would say about Lutherans. How will this joke of a poem change for the next few chapters of our church?

-In Amos' time and place, the actions of Judaism and the rulers of the Kingdom of Israel were not quite as funny. Amos lived at a time of relative peace and prosperity for the tiny nation of Israel. Enemies were at bay, crops were good, life was reasonable. However, Amos was continually disturbed by the actions King Jeroboam II and the Temple priests took to not look after God's people, but instead enrich and benefit themselves. He was horrified by the fact that the king and Temple elites would go to the Temple, hear the words of the Torah, participate in ritual cleansings and worship, and yet conspire with one another to wrench resources away from those in need.

-This is the context that our reading from Amos comes from and is addressing. Just last week, our adult education class who is going through a series of lectures by the world renowned Old Testament scholar, Dr. Walter Bruggemann, witnessed his lecture on the Hebrew word *hohee* commonly translated in English as "whoa". This word is used in our OT passage today at the beginning of verse 18 (however, it is weirdly translated in our NRSV version here at the beginning of the passage as "alas"-whatever that means).

Interestingly, *hohee* or “whoa” is a term of mourning and is commonly used by the prophets when they are in great despair. “Whoa, for you who desire the day of the Lord! Why do you want the day of the Lord?” writes Amos. Here you are, he’s saying, putting on a great show, and talking-the-talk of “when the Messiah comes, it will be awesome”, yet when you leave the temple all that “worship” stuff seems to go out the window. Amos, like many prophets, is calling out great hypocrisy and I believe brings out in his writing a very important question: What does it mean to be authentic in life and in faith? What does it mean to not only talk-the-talk, but walk-the-walk? For Amos, following God was not just showing up to worship and going through the motions, but living out the teachings that God has given us through scripture. For Amos, this teaching was simple: “love the LORD your God with all your heart and mind, and love your neighbor as yourself.” If you’re not authentic in living this out, then what good are your festivals, solemn assemblies, and offerings? For Amos, if your life doesn’t reflect your worship, then it’s all meaningless.

-Last Sunday, while we were all gathered here for All Saints Sunday honoring the dead, a mad-man shooter entered First Baptist Church of Sutherland Springs, TX during worship with a semi-automatic weapon and mowed down the congregation killing 26 individuals including a 1 ½ year old child and a pregnant mother. This attack, of course, happens just a few weeks after another madman gunman mowed down a crowd at a country music festival in Las Vegas killing 58 people. 2017 already to date will go down as the worst year for mass shooting deaths in American history. Politicians and leaders across our country condemned violence all saying generally like: “Reports out of Texas are devastating, The people of Sutherland Springs need our thoughts and prayers right now.....” Yet, even with mass shootings becoming more and more common, action to address the issue in any way: from enacting basic safeguard laws for purchasing guns to increasing funding for mental health programs is not happening. Sending of thoughts and prayers, thoughts and prayers, thoughts and prayers.....

-“Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals I will not look upon. Take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your harps. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.” What does Amos’ call of an authentic life mean for us in our time and place?

-I want to turn to our gospel reading briefly from the book of Matthew to help us parse this out a little more. I think we get so stuck in our usual interpretation of this parable that we can miss other readings which might be more relevant to us. The usual interpretation, of course, goes like this: the bridegroom is Jesus. The bridesmaids are us. We need to be ready for the physical Jesus to come back and pluck us up (like the *Left Behind* series), open the door to heaven, and walk through. Now, this is a valid interpretation in some ways but it brings up some major issues for me. Firstly, it makes

the focus of our lives solely on our “ticket to heaven”. As long as we are ready to go up the escalator and meet St. Peter, everything else can be secondary. Secondly, until God acts in a specific way of sending Jesus back in flesh and bone, we don’t have to pay as much attention to other actions of God which might be just as powerful.

-What if, instead of seeing this text describing Jesus’ blockbuster, one-time, coming back to earth, we see this parable as our continuing meeting of Christ. What if, instead of us having to wait for the “heaven escalator” to turn on (which is exhausting by the way), this text is instead calling us to be ready for opportunities to “love God and love neighbor”.

-Maybe it was Christ the bridegroom who came in Missoula Aging Services wanting to partner with our church to do a senior lunch. Maybe it was Christ the bridegroom who comes every year in the teachers and staff of Bonner School who say: “Hey, we really need _____ to help our kids right now.” Maybe it is Christ the bridegroom who came in our community members thanking our church for hosting the Superfund Run this last April.

-Being authentic, for Amos, is less about just simply being active to be active, but more about being grounded in faithful opportunities that you don’t know when are going to come. Being grounded in faithful opportunities doesn’t mean a passive “waiting for Christ to come along”, but instead calls us to live a life that is always seeking and always trying to go deeper.

-What if Christ the bridegroom was now here opening the door to greater collaboration and advocacy among churches in relation to senseless gun violence? Turns out, our former and beloved Pastor Jean is very involved with Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America, a group that is doing vital work. Maybe Christ is opening the door for us to partner in some way. I don’t know yet.

-But what I do know is this: don’t just come to church. Come authentically to church. Live out your passions in connection with faith. Maybe in the next 150 years, “I’m a Lutheran” can go more like this: *We are Lutherans. We are an authentic people, and we make a fuss sometimes. Because it sure would be better if the world was not all like us. We stand for loving the neighbor as ourselves and when we say hello, we look them in the eye and say you are loved here. And maybe we sit in the back sometimes, but we know that being church is not just sitting in the pew. And shouting Amen is sometimes what we have to do in order to bring God’s kingdom of justice and peace right here and right now. And if anyone yells or waves their hand, we embrace them and say may God bless you because as Martin Luther says: “I can do no other. For here I stand.” Amen.*