

“Chores”
July 24, 2011
Grove Presbyterian Church

Old Testament Lesson

Amos 6: 1-7

Alas for those who are at ease in Zion, and for those who feel secure on Mount Samaria, the notables of the first of the nations, to whom the house of Israel resorts! Cross over to Calneh, and see; from there go to Hamath the great; then go down to Gath of the Philistines.

Are you better than these kingdoms? Or is your territory greater than their territory, O you that put far away the evil day, and bring near a reign of violence?

Alas for those who lie on beds of ivory, and lounge on their couches, and eat lambs from the flock, and calves from the stall; who sing idle songs to the sound of the harp, and like David improvise on instruments of music; who drink wine from bowls, and anoint themselves with the finest oils, but are not grieved over the ruin of Joseph!

Therefore they shall now be the first to go into exile, and the revelry of the loungers shall pass away.

Stinging words. Amos stings Israel with true words: any country where the kleptocracy of the few rich dominate the majority poor will not long last as a country.

Amos. A comfortable farmer called to cause trouble by going into the Northern Country of Israel and make uncomfortable accusations.

They didn't like hearing his accusations because Israel, at the height of its financial and military power, assumed itself spiritually superior and thus deserving of its rewards. But Israel's wealth was mined by strip mining the poor and the vulnerable. Its religion was pretense, pride, and pathetic. The few idle rich enjoyed their pleasures because others suffered. Such a nation loses its moral and spiritual legitimacy. Beneath their wealth lay the rot of violence and bones of corruption. These men and women forgot that the gift of wealth requires responsibility. Those to whom much is given, of them much is expected.

Let us be careful to avoid mistaking prophets for Tarot Card fortune tellers. Sure prophets can predict the future, but only because they have such a keen grasp of the present. Prophets hold up the people, the country, and contrast what they are doing with the revealed will of God. More than fortune tellers, they are truth tellers. Which is why the prophets were so universally disliked. Whoever likes a conscience?

These rich ladies dallied through the day being waited on. Earlier, Amos called them the cows of Bashan; basically, fat cows. Wine at their command, with delicacies to nibble

on through the day. Slaves sing to them. Their demand for more drives their husbands to commit great injustices.

**Hear this word, you cows of Bashan,
who are on the mountain of Samaria, who oppress the poor, who crush the needy,
who say to your husbands, “Bring wine, let us drink.”**

Lazy luxury built on the whipped backs of the oppressed will not long last. Look to Tunisia or Egypt. Interesting too how the Middle Class only wakes up and gets angry when they start feeling the pinch.

New Testament Lesson

Acts 18: 1-4

In contrast to such luxury and idleness, we have Paul and his attitude toward work and responsibility. Here in the Book of Acts, the book which tells the story of how the church began, we gain a glimpse of how Paul told the good news of Jesus. He never wanted to be like some other teachers and speakers who would wander into a town like prince-lings and expect to be applauded and given fine rooms and fine foods.

Paul wanted his people to be able to say, “He’s different -- he earns his own way.”

This is one reason why all Rabbis were trained to teach, yes, but: God’s Word is so precious it should never be used for barter. So, all Rabbis also were trained in a trade to earn their income. In Paul’s case, he was a tent-maker, a leather worker. The other advantage to Paul working and earning his own keep was that he then would never be beholden to a congregation. Paychecks can trap you.

It can be awkward stinging a congregation, truth-telling, when they write your paycheck.

After this Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. There he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them, and, because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them, and they worked together— by trade they were tentmakers. Every sabbath he would argue in the synagogue and would try to convince Jews and Greeks.

Reflection

Chores. Strange subject, perhaps, from the pulpit.

Chores.

Do you have chores to do? What chores did you have to do when you were young?

Did you get paid for mowing your lawn? For clearing the table? Making your bed? Or was it just because you were part of family and everybody had to pitch in. The

economics of the household. You get bed and board -- you weed and mow. Why should you expect to get paid? Yes, you are a servant. Isn't that wonderful? What an honor! You should be proud you're a servant. Better than being privileged. Much better.

I'm working on a theory that those children raised to do chores do a whole lot better in life than those whose parents didn't make them do chores. Oh, yes, playing sports or getting good grades do not count as chores.

Those never expected to do chores, I argue, don't do as well in life. How are they going to handle it when a boss is telling them what to do? Something about pride. Something about self-respect. Something about doing something for others. Something about learning to work with others. Something about learning skills. Something about learning responsibility. Something about the joy of being useful. "Look, mom, I made my own peanut butter and jelly sandwich!"

Something about an earned sense of accomplishment.

Chores. Your home displays who you are.

Chores: Comes from the source word, char, as in a char-woman.

Chores: daily household odd jobs.

Most of which are nuisances. At first blush.

Chores can become fun. They can be. Raking leaves together. Shoveling snow together. Chances even, as writer Gary Thorp once wrote, where ordinary chores become devotions, prayers. You transform the drudgery to opportunities. Clean windows help you appreciate nature. Dusting reminds you're never finished, more dust always returns. Such is life. Sweeping floors helps you reflect on what dirt and fuzz balls you need to sweep out of your own soul. This author quotes a Zen master as saying, which I paraphrase: "How can you save the world if you cannot tidy up your room?"

Or, at the least, chores can become occasions for us to learn something. Grandma taught me to spot the difference between a daisy and a dandelion. Taught how to adjust the throttle on the lawnmower. Or those happy days helping in the kitchen and taught how to make a tuna casserole. Even being forced to postpone going out with your friends because you have to take care of the dogs first. And that strange pride when you get to tell your buddies in that off-hand way how your dad let you help him split logs with the axe or how he taught you how to paint the shutters with an oil based paint.

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Chores – admittedly now not always fun – but we too can be prophetic here and predict the future based upon the present: for imagine what happens if you don't do your chores? Try it.

Don't cut your lawn.  
Don't seal the deck.  
Don't check your car engine.  
Don't take out the garbage  
Don't dust your room.  
Don't weed the garden.  
Don't clear the table or wash the dishes.

Daily life is a daily struggle against the daily mess. We must interfere to keep things right. And it sure makes more sense to keep at it daily rather than let it slide and then you really have a mess to clean up. Easier to mow the lawn weekly than let it go until you need a John Deere harvester. Easier to bother changing the oil in the car every 3,000 miles rather than ignoring it and ending up with a broken engine.

It takes an effort to make things right and tidy. The mess comes quite naturally.

Whether in our houses or in our souls.

Easier when we take care of the little messes before they fester and become big messes. Taking care of the worm is easier than slaying the dragon.

I will sit down and help my son with his homework before he falls farther behind.  
I will not go to sleep angry with her; we will talk about what's bothering us now.  
I will not get drunk today.  
I will avoid the little lie lest it makes it easier to tell the big lie  
I will send the note of apology lest the bitterness harden into concrete

I will take the time and make the effort in the little things, for it is the little things that matter the most.

Let's face it: chores have to be done all the time. With our homes and with our souls. For we may be Christians but that means we are untidy and messy, messy Christians. We are unfinished and inadequate. We do our best to be neat and tidy but there's always another fine mess to deal with.

From the book, Children's Letters to God:

Dear God,  
I'm doing the best I can.  
[signed] Frank

We sure could use a little help.