

St. Paul: Weekly Devotions

*Devotions on week's readings
for 07.12.15 (Pentecost 7b)*

Day One: Amos 7:7-15

And the LORD asked me, "What do you see, Amos?"

"A plumb line," I replied.

Then the Lord said, "Look, I am setting a plumb line among my people Israel; I will spare them no longer."

A plumb line is used by builders to make sure that a wall is standing straight. We use that expression ourselves. Mom says, 'Straighten up!' Or we say that a criminal (or a crook) is one who is literally 'crooked'.

A plumb line reveals an error that might otherwise be invisible. Even professional builders might not be able to see that the wall they are building is crooked. They are standing too close to their work and can't tell that it's gone wrong. But if this wall is crooked then the ceiling might be crooked, and the adjoining walls might be crooked. The entire house could be built off kilter without the builder noticing until it's too late!

But placing a plumb line next to your work immediately makes the error visible. Suddenly anyone can see that it is crooked.

God told the prophet Amos that he was going to put a plumb line among his people. He was going to measure them. Like a careless builder, they were unable to see their sin. But simply placing God's Law next to them would reveal that they are hopelessly out of line.

Thankfully, in Christ, we are not measured according to the same standard. We live in God's grace. Jesus has "justified" us, that is, he has made us straight.

As followers of Jesus, we still need a plumb line, a standard against which we can compare our lives. And where we find it crooked or leaning, then we begin repairs. That's called repentance and absolution. Our wall will always tend to totter, but our cornerstone is Jesus, and he stays firm.

Prayer: Dear Spirit of God, you know my crookedness. Renew me in July to 'sit up straight' again as your holy child, forgiven and refreshed by the Gospel. Amen.

Day Two: Ephesians 1:3-14

Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession--to the praise of his glory.

Wait. You're telling me that the Holy Spirit is like "money in the bank"?

Actually, yes. That's exactly what Paul is saying. The Holy Spirit is a "deposit guaranteeing our inheritance." Think of it this way...

I saw an internet photo caption that said, "I keep waiting for my parents to tell me that they're actually millionaires, and we only lived like this so that I could learn humility." The person in the picture is hoping that his parents are actually rich. But what if you knew that your Father really WAS super rich? What difference would that make in your life?

If your Father didn't give you piles of money, it might not mean that your current life changes a lot, but it would surely mean that you would always live with the sense that you have a fallback – a safe landing place – just in case.

What if you knew that you had money in the bank? Maybe it isn't money that you can touch right now. Maybe it is tied up in "non-liquid" investments. But if you know that you've got some money socked away, doesn't that help you sleep easier at night? Your daily life might have its ups and downs. Maybe today you came up short again. But you will always know that you're OK.

Paul says that you have been marked by God. You've been sealed. If you walk into a bank today and show them your identification, that might not get you anything at all. Unless you have a million on deposit, they won't jump up to hold the door for you.

But if you stand before God and show him your "seal," your identity as His baptized child through Jesus Christ, then he will always, day or night, even on the holidays, open up the vault and bring out the treasures of his love and forgiveness.

Prayer: Dear Spirit of God, since I have been marked by you in my baptism, help me remember who I am. Let me remember that I am not poor, but rich in your love. Amen.

Day Three: Mark 6:14-29

The king was greatly distressed, but because of his oaths and his dinner guests, he did not want to refuse her. ²⁷ So he immediately sent an executioner with orders to bring John's head. The man went, beheaded John in the prison, ²⁸ and brought back his head on a platter. He presented it to the girl, and she gave it to her mother. ²⁹ On hearing of this, John's disciples came and took his body and laid it in a tomb.

Spiderman gave up his personal safety and comfort to save the city from Doctor Octopus. Iron Man used his great intelligence to build inventions that would help people and defeat evil. Superman fought “for Truth, Justice, and the American Way!” We love heroes because of the things they do.

Just witness all the superhero movies that keep coming out. Although there is a point in the movie that the good guy is beaten down and defeated, yet through great effort and daring and strength, the hero always wins in the end.

The Christian faith does not have heroes. We don't revere people for their powers. We don't admire people just for their actions, for their

courage, or for their strength. We don't just honor those who win. If we remember those who died in the faith it is for another reason.

Have you ever seen a group of people posing for the camera holding a giant check for a large amount of money? These are usually checks for millions of dollars, but you can't take a check like that to the bank. People only make those checks to show how valuable the prize is.

John's death is a bit like that. His death didn't do anything. By dying, John did not defeat King Herod, but his death shows just how valuable his Savior must be – Jesus is more precious than life itself.

Your neighbors notice what you sacrifice because of your faith. But your sacrifices don't show what a wonderful or strong person you are. They show what you think of Jesus.

Having watched you, what would your neighbors say Jesus is worth to you?

Prayer: Dearest Jesus, fill me with such a love for you that I don't even notice what I might give up. Let my greatest loss seem like a gift in comparison to your love. Amen.

Day Four: James 2:18

But someone will say, “You have faith and I have works.” Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.

In the lessons for next week we see three examples of believers whose faith was visible to the world. Amos was called to speak up so that the people would see God’s truth. Paul said the believers were marked with a seal. And John gave his life, showing the surpassing value of the Savior for whom he lived.

I have friends who are really in to hockey. They love hockey. Hockey forms a part of the nucleus of their family, and you can’t talk to them for very long without finding out about their love for hockey.

I have friends who are passionate about politics. I know some for whom sports permeates their whole life. I know many who feel strongly about health. They are always aware of what they eat and how they exercise, and they care about the health of others. Some are too pushy, but most are just there to give encouragement or help.

How does your faith in Jesus show up in your life?

Knowing that he rescued you from eternal death – knowing that he has washed you, changed your view of yourself so that you can now see how precious you are to God – does this change what others see in you?

“I will show you my faith by my works,” James said. He was not talking about just obeying the law or giving to charity. He was talking about his actions of loving God and his neighbor, listening, caring, helping, praying for others.

You have been sealed, marked as one of God’s own. You have been called, like Amos, to stand out. What does that mean in your life?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, make me different. Make me stand out because of your love. Let me not settle for blending in, but let your love shine in me. Amen.*

These devotions help us to think ahead about the Bible verses we will read in worship next week. They are written weekly by Pastor Don Neuendorf. You can learn more about our worship or our church at stpaulannarbor.org