

## **Amos 7**

7 This is what the Lord showed me: The Lord was standing by a wall, with a plumb line in his hand. 8 The Lord said to me, “Amos, what do you see?”

“A plumb line,” I said.

Then the Lord said,

“See, I am setting a plumb line

in the middle of my people Israel.

I will never again forgive them.

9 The shrines of Isaac will be made desolate,

and the holy places of Israel will be laid waste,

and I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword.”

10 Then Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, reported to Israel’s King Jeroboam, “Amos has plotted against you within the house of Israel. The land isn’t able to cope with everything that he is saying. 11 Amos has said, ‘Jeroboam will die by the sword, and Israel will be forced out of its land.’”

12 Amaziah said to Amos, “You who see things, go, run away to the land of Judah, eat your bread there, and prophesy there; 13 but never again prophesy at Bethel, for it is the king’s holy place and his royal house.”

14 Amos answered Amaziah, “I am not a prophet, nor am I a prophet’s son; but I am a shepherd, and a trimmer of sycamore trees. 15 But the Lord took me from shepherding the flock, and the Lord said to me, ‘Go, prophesy to my people Israel.’”

## **John 16**

14 Herod the king heard about these things, because the name of Jesus had become well-known. Some were saying, “John the Baptist has been raised from the dead, and this is why miraculous powers are at work through him.” 15 Others were saying, “He is Elijah.” Still others were saying, “He is a prophet like one of the ancient prophets.” 16 But when Herod heard these rumors, he said, “John, whom I beheaded, has been raised to life.”

17 He said this because Herod himself had arranged to have John arrested and put in prison because of Herodias, the wife of Herod’s brother Philip. Herod had married her, 18 but John told Herod, “It’s against the law for you to marry your brother’s wife!” 19 So Herodias had it in for John. She wanted to kill him, but she couldn’t. 20 This was because Herod respected John. He regarded him as a righteous and holy person, so he protected him. John’s words greatly confused Herod, yet he enjoyed listening to him.

21 Finally, the time was right. It was on one of Herod’s birthdays, when he had prepared a feast for his high-ranking officials and military officers and Galilee’s leading residents. 22 Herod’s daughter Herodias came in and danced, thrilling Herod and his dinner guests. The king said to the young woman, “Ask me whatever you wish, and I will give it to you.” 23 Then he swore to her, “Whatever you ask I will give to you, even as much as half of my kingdom.”

24 She left the banquet hall and said to her mother, “What should I ask for?”

“John the Baptist’s head,” Herodias replied.

25 Hurrying back to the ruler, she made her request: “I want you to give me John the Baptist’s head on a plate, right this minute.” 26 Although the king was upset, because of his solemn pledge and his guests, he didn’t want to refuse her. 27 So he ordered a guard to bring John’s head. The guard went to the prison, cut off John’s head, 28 brought his head on a plate, and gave it to the young woman, and she gave it to her mother. 29 When John’s disciples heard what had happened, they came and took his dead body and laid it in a tomb.

### **Sermon**

Lord, open my lips and my mouth will declare your praise.  
Lord, open our hearts and our lives will sing out your name. Amen.

Thanks to Pastor Wolfe for the invitation to preach, for the hospitality I’ve received so far this morning, and the first congregation ever that’s sent me a pulpit supply check before I preached! That’s high level trust.

Laying under the walls of new buildings at Ashland.  
Wonky brick.  
No plumbline.  
What’s a plumbline?  
Measure of the verticality, to keep the wall level,  
unswerving, undeviating.  
Strength in the center. Not about the outer line, but the  
core stacking.

Christ is our plumbline, the measure of our alignment and  
center of our strength.

What do we learn from John the Baptist’s death?

The Gospel is **dangerous** to the power of the state.

Like for Jesus, living the Gospel entails **consequences** for Christ followers.

Love based in God rather than obedience based in state-sanctioned laws, whether a constitution or a code or a court is the life to which we are called.

One of the joys of my ministry is serving among students who seek out Christ's plumbline. Rarely does a wall call out to a mason and ask for a measurement. Yet, undergraduates at Capital University and seminarians at Trinity Lutheran Seminary try daily to look, live, and love more like Jesus. As the news of separation of migrant families came to common knowledge, I received a swarm of texts, emails, messages, and calls asking if we could do something. We organized a worship service, took up an offering to benefit Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service as well as First English Lutheran Church as they provide sanctuary to a migrant family.

Bonner Scholars program.

Upcoming spring break trip to Advent ELCA in Boca Raton. Lutheran, Haitian, historically African american, and messianic Jewish congregations sharing building and ministry. Anti human trafficking work. Migrant work. Aligning our breaks time with God's plumb line.

That's the legacy of Lutheran education: we don't just dump information into minds or form habits for occupations. We shape entire lives to embody God's justice, minds and bodies and spirits

along the plumbline of the Gospel. Christ is our plumb line for this work.

Do you use the plumb line? Do we? What else do we use?

Do you trust the plumb line? Do we? What else do we trust?

Every time we choose partisan policies over people, we forsake god's plumb line.

Every time we choose laws over love, we forsake god's plumb line.

Jesus had no interest in creating a nation of laws Christ had every intention of creating a community of love.

How do we come to know this plumb line? Wesleyan quadrilateral: scripture, tradition, reason, and experience. John Wesley developed this as he saw the Holy Spirit set spiritual fire to churches across the United States. We Lutherans, at least, should note that while Wesley was an Anglican by tradition, his spiritual awakening began when he read Martin Luther's commentary on Romans. Regardless of his background, Wesley helps us to see that scripture, and especially the gospels, help us to know Jesus. 2,000 years of church tradition, women and men of faith of all races and genders and ethnicities and sexualities have shown us profound ways to engage with Jesus. Reason, our rationality, helps us to understand Jesus's relationship to all things, and experience connects us with the unique image of god that we bear, the wonderfully particular way we connect with God and reflect God to

the wider world. As we know the plumb line, as we know Christ, we're called to construct our lives, thought, word and deed, according to that knowledge.

Of course, this is not about earning salvation. Luther's great insight was that we should have a clear conscience in relation to our eternal status: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us! God's love chose us before we existed and even when we didn't deserve it!

Yet, this connects with another of Luther's great insights: God doesn't need your good works, but your neighbor does, and God loves your neighbor with the same relentless love that brought you salvation. In that light, Christ as plumb line doesn't measure our eternal worth - that's been infinitely sealed in the resurrection - but instead measures our present commitment to the love that overpowers death and the grave. God will not send us to hell for disobedience, but neither will God ensure the existence of our beloved institutions if they don't align with the plumb of grace. That's true of this and every congregation. That's true of capital university and Trinity Lutheran Seminary and every institution of theological and higher education. That's true of the ELCA and every denomination. God wants us, God loves us, but God does not need us. We, though, certainly need God.

Fortunately, God provides for us a plumb line in Christ to see and know what life, true life, abundant life looks like not just for us, but for all people, and the truest measure of that plumb line? Whether we are sharing the gifts God has given us - time and treasure,

bread and wine, font and faith - with the world that so desperately needs these things. Amen.