



Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

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October 29, 2006

21st Sunday after Pentecost

Amos 5:6-7, 10-15

Pastor Randy Ott

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 90

Second Lesson: Hebrews 3:1-6

Gospel: Mark 10:17-27

Seek the Lord and Live

How many of you played “Hide and Seek” as a kid? How many of you still want to play “Hide and Seek?” I remember that as a family we would go and visit other relatives or other friends and there would be a bunch of us kids. I never caught onto it when I was a kid, but now I look back and see that our parents always encouraged us to go play “Hide and Seek.” I never was sure why except that now I figured out it is because when you are hiding, you are quiet so you don’t get found, so parents can actually talk and not have to shout at each other. I did catch onto it a little bit as I got a little older when my sister would be bugging me to play a game. I would say, “Sure, let’s play ‘Hide and Seek’ and you go hide.”

Hide and seek isn’t really just a kids’ game though, is it? This morning, through the prophet Amos, our God encourages us to seek the Lord and live. He has to encourage us to do that because the problem is that even though we are adults, or if you are children or wherever you are in your life, there are times when you and I want to hide from the Lord. There might be other things going on in our lives and we want to go chase after them or there might be other things that we think are more important. We get busy with this. We get busy with that and pretty soon we have found that intentionally or not, we have hidden ourselves from God.

You and I at times want to hide from God because we know our sins and we know that our sins hurt God. But our God is a God of love. The One who created this world, gave us a beautiful world to live in, didn’t abandon us when Adam and Eve fell into sin and the world was ruined—he didn’t just destroy it and start over like I probably would have. You can be thankful that I am not God. Instead, he promised and then sent Jesus to live and die in our place to take away every last one of our sins so that we would know for certain that God sought us and found us and took away our sins. He pleads with us and urges us through his Gospel, through his Word, to believe this glorious truth. Then even he himself gives us the power to believe because we can’t do it on our own.

Our God’s love for us is so intense that even as the nation of the children of Israel was 30 years away from being completely destroyed, he sent Amos to them to urge them to seek the Lord and live because he wanted them to be with him. He knew what he would do to take away their sins.

As we consider these Words of our God this morning, seek the Lord and live, we do well to listen to his warnings and to look at our own life and see where these warnings need to strike home in our hearts because we are all too often just like the children of the

Northern Kingdom. But then our God urges us to do the one thing that only his Spirit enables us to do—that is to cling to his mercy and hold onto it tightly when all these other things around us are terrifying us—cling to his mercy because it is in his mercy that we seek the Lord and live.

I don't know how much you know about the prophet Amos. He was a shepherd and he also had some sycamore fig trees and he was in the Southern Kingdom of Judah, the two Southern Tribes. Remember after Solomon died, the Northern Kingdom split off and the ten Northern Tribes went their own way and the two Southern Tribes, the Tribes of Judah, became two separate kingdoms. God came to Amos about 750 B.C. and told him to go to the Northern Kingdom, which wouldn't be a fun thing because all the kings of the Northern Kingdom worshipped false gods. None of them ever worshipped the Lord. Sure there were still some people in the Northern Kingdom that worshipped the Lord, but at this point in time many had fallen away. The reason was because things were going well. They were prosperous. Business was booming. When you read through the Book of Amos, you see what happened when business was booming in the Northern Kingdom of Israel.

We are told that the people went through the motions of religion. They went and offered their sacrifices to the Lord in their way and they thought that was good enough. You offer your sacrifices and you do your God thing at this point in life and then the rest of the week you do what you want—that is kind of how their attitude had become. When you read the Book of Amos, you find out some of these problems and how they were trying to separate faith from their daily lives as though just going through the motions would be enough to appease God.

Some of them are mentioned here: *You trample on the poor* (Amos 5:11). One of the things we are told they did was to add dirt to their wheat so that they would get a better price for their wheat. They would cheat people. They would manipulate the justice system to get things to go their way and then they would take the wine that was paid and the exorbitant fines they maneuvered out of people and take it to their religious festivals and act as though God would be happy with that offering.

It is in that setting that God sends Amos and says, "You go tell them to turn back to me and live." How would you like to be Amos?—in the middle of a land of plenty telling people, "You are irritating God. Turn back to God because what you are doing is not pleasing to God." The people saying "Look around Amos. Things are going well. God must love us. God must be happy with what we are doing." Again and again he had to speak that message and again and again he had to be rejected. Yet, he continued faithfully. He said, *Seek the LORD and live* (Amos 5:6). He warned them by saying, "If you keep trying to segment your life by saying 'here is my God thing and here is the other part of my life', God's wrath is going to come on you." That word "fire" is used in what I just read to you from Amos (see Amos 5:6). It is used in the Book over and over. The fire of God's judgment would come on them.

The sad thing is that the children of the Northern Kingdom didn't listen and in 722 B.C., less than 30 years after this, the Assyrians came and carried them off. You might think to yourself that Amos was a failure. I don't think so. He served his God faithfully and

his words still serve us today and remind us that faith in God is not just about going through the motions. You can't come and sit in the church pew for an hour each week and think that must make you a Christian. No, it's not about what you do. It is about what God did for you. Once you see what God did for you, that he loved you enough to live in your place and die in your place, then you want to do the things that God wants you to do. You don't want to trample on the poor. You don't want to hate the one who reproves in court. You don't want to despise him who tells the truth. You want to do what is right before God to thank him that he has given you heaven.

You and I don't always do that, do we? We might not consciously say, "I have done my God thing and now I am going to do my other thing in my daily life," but the fact of the matter is that you and I often do that. We don't always put God first in every last decision we make during the week. We don't even put God first in every last decision we make as we sit in church. Tell me you haven't sat here and thought about something else as some guy in a black robe is up here talking on and on and on. We don't put God first, we can't put God first because we are sinners, yet we need to hear God's warning to always turn back to him and to turn back to the love he has for us in Christ because the fact of the matter is that we are going to screw up. We are going to make wrong decisions. We are not going to live to God's glory and when that happens, we need to turn back to God and seek the Lord and live, because if we put our confidence that on the Day of Judgment we are going to meet God and say, "Lord I have always done what is right before you," we have no confidence at all.

But, we can stand before God and say, "Jesus Christ did everything perfectly for me. Jesus Christ is my perfection that clothed me at my baptism. Jesus Christ, his very body and blood, is what washed away my sins when I came to the Lord's Supper. Jesus Christ for me is the message that hit my eardrums as I heard the Word of God or hit my eyeballs as I read his Word in my life. That is my confidence, Lord, what you have done for me."

That is why you and I cling to his mercy, because if we are left on our own, we have no hope. Left on our own, we are going to wander down the wrong path. Left on our own, we are going to hide from God because we are going to think that we have better things to do.

But God's love is so amazing and so intense that it covers us and it forgives us even when we have turned and went the other way. Our God's love is so amazing that because we are in Christ, we are covered by grace and we live in his grace. For you and I there is no "perhaps the Lord Almighty will have mercy on us." For you and I, there is a joyful "God has had mercy on us and the Spirit has led me to believe this and God has worked his love into my heart, into the essence of who I am." It's not what we do that makes us a Christian—it's what God has done for us. What God has done for us makes us who we are. We are redeemed children of God who live under his grace in spite of all the times that we have tried to hide.

Cling to God's grace. It sustains us when we hit life's rocky roads. It lifts us up when we stumble and when we have fallen away from God. It assures us that the same love that washed away our sins is still there for us when we return to the Lord, the God who

made us and redeemed us. Cling to his mercy. Seek the Lord and live. That is God's promise to you in Christ.