

Hearing critical words (Amos 7:7-17)

We can and must test prophetic messages we receive.

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Who is able to helpfully critique a faith community? We live in a time of ever-increasing narratives coming from widely diverse perspectives. Many claim that theirs is a message from God, a revealing truth that is urgently needed. To whom should we listen?

In this prophetic vision of Amos, King Jeroboam receives a searing revelation of doom. But rather than explore what it means or beg for mercy or seek other counsel, he reacts with a swift dismissal. *I don't want to hear it, so remove yourself from my world.* It feels like a toddler's undeveloped thinking: If I don't see you, you don't exist. If I pretend that I didn't hear it, it won't happen.

Jeroboam is attempting to make his own truth. We see leaders doing that a lot these days. And while it may seem effective from their perspective, we know that it cannot hold up against the One that knows all things. Walls built on crooked foundations will ultimately fail. The demise may be subtle and slow, but when things are out of plumb with truth, they will fall apart.

As people of faith in Jesus, we can trust the deep foundation of God's great plan. We can and must test prophetic words. In their commentary on Amos, Elmer Martens and Willard Swartley write, "The prophetic message springs from inner compulsion of the Spirit, compassion for people, identification with the poor and the needy, and

an intense longing to see the kingdom of God established.” These are wise guidelines to measure any prophetic utterances.

After listening to Amos, Amaziah rushes to inform the king about the outrageous speech. Is Amaziah’s intent malicious or innocent when he paraphrases Amos with even sharper words? “Jeroboam shall die by the sword, and Israel must go into exile away from his land.” In what ways do we allow middle messengers to interpret what God is saying? How can we listen faithfully together as a community? How can we both test and absorb prophetic words with wisdom?

In my tradition of Anabaptism it is an essential understanding that faithful living is not determined as individuals but always in the context of our communal life. Of course that doesn’t mean that we have any fewer opinions or that we come to easy conclusions. A look at our long history of divisive church splits forces us to recognize our decimating weakness. But in spite of this shortcoming, I continue to find resounding hope in our shared faith journey. I’m grateful that we listen to the news, read scripture, welcome questions, and fidget uncomfortably together with hard words. In the wisdom of many perspectives we come closer to the truth of God’s Good News.