

## Service of Confession and Prayer: Amos 7:7-9 [16.11.2016]

### *Being in line with God's Word*

<sup>7</sup> Then he showed me another vision. I saw the Lord standing beside a wall that had been built using a plumb line. He was using a plumb line to see if it was still straight.

<sup>8</sup> And the LORD said to me, "Amos, what do you see?"

I answered, "A plumb line."

And the Lord replied, "I will test my people with this plumb line. I will no longer ignore all their sins. <sup>9</sup> The pagan shrines of your ancestors will be ruined, and the temples of Israel will be destroyed; I will bring the dynasty of King Jeroboam to a sudden end." [NLT]

It appears that building straight walls is not always as easy as it looks. Anyone who has employed a bricklayer to do some alterations finds that out the hard way. Somebody we know had some alterations done at their house. Day after day as he returned home from work, he would kick the wall over, because it was not straight. He did not even need a plumb line to check it, because it was so far out of line.

Getting things straight: How about your life - is it in line with God's Word and commandments? How would you fare, how would we as a congregation and church fare, if God were to measure how we live and what we do by the plumb line of his Word?

The prophet Amos had been given the thankless task of pointing out to the people of Israel that their lives were not in line with what God expected of them. How would they react to it? - how do you react when you are made aware that things are not in line with God's Word?

When a wall has been built less than straight, there is often an attempt to cover it up - sometimes quite creatively.

In Israel the cover-up was that they still attended the worship at the temple - in fact they made sure that they had the best of sacrifices to bring to God. But that was only meant as a cover-up so that they could do as they pleased. It was meant as a cover-up for the fact that they had grown too close to the world that surrounded them - so that pagan idols and practises were to be found among them. Furthermore the prophet underlines over and over the oppression and

exploitation of the poor by the wealthy and the ruling classes.

As we take stock of our lives at the end of this church year, how do we measure up? Do we try to cover up that our lives are not quite in line with God's Word, when he applies his plumb line to our life? Do we use the services we attend, the devotions we read as a kind of cover-up for what is actually happening in our lives?

Have we not all too often also aligned ourselves too closely with the world we live in? Of course we don't have idols - or do we? When we think of the explanation to the 1<sup>st</sup> Commandment - do we truly 'fear, love and trust God above all else'?

When we stand around a braai or at any social gathering - what is it that we talk about? What are the fears that always seem to rise to the surface - is it our fear of the future, and of what will happen to us if ...?

What is it that we dedicate our time and our lives to? - that we love with all our heart, and which leaves little place for anything else?

Is it not a problem, that we make an idol of money - whether we have it, and rely on our bank account to guarantee our life, or whether we think that our lives would be so much better if we had more?

How about the second part of the Great Commandment - to love our neighbour as ourselves? Do our relationships with people we deal with show that? Do they reflect that we have been made new by God - i.e. do people recognise that we belong to God by how we speak to them? Does it become apparent by our relationships with our spouses and our children that God is the driving force of our lives?

We know that God does not simply kick over a wall that is not entirely straight - but have we come to rely on this fact so much that we no longer believe that we need to change our lives and to remove those things which stand out against God's plumb line?

That was what people in Israel had believed. They had the feeling that they were immune to God's anger, that their position as his chosen people allowed them to live as they chose.

Amos was sent to warn and encourage Israel to turn back to God's Word. This warning and the invitation of our Lord is addressed to us today also. The warning inherent in these verses must be clear to us: God will one day carry out the punishment he has threatened for all who neglect to follow his call. This punishment is that he will remove his hand of grace and love, and that he will 'kick over the wall' which is not plumb in line with his Word.

God's intention by this call, however, is not to destroy, but for us to 'get in line' with his will. That is not always easy or painless - but it is necessary. It is only as we turn away from what we have chosen for ourselves, it is only as we remove ourselves from the influence of the world which does not know him that we have life once more.

God's call to us is for now - not to put it off for some other time. We will have to learn not to go into 'cover-up mode' - not to defend why we do things which really are not plumb in line with God, and with the new life he has given us.

God's call wants our lives to be aligned with his Word - because that is the only way to really have life - and truly live.