

If...Then, Why?  
First Presbyterian Church  
1 Kings (selected verses)  
Amos 5:21-24

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32<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

Amos was mad. He came after Solomon. He was not speaking directly to him, but I think we get a glimpse as far back as the time of Solomon as to why someone like Amos would be so angry. We learn from the Rehoboam story that the northern kingdom had been over taxed and over worked to support Solomon's grand building campaigns.

The passage the liturgist read said that in Solomon's time, silver was as numerous as stones in the city of Jerusalem, and someone had to mine that silver and someone had to get it there, but it pops up even earlier in Solomon story.

Pop quiz: How long did it take Solomon to complete construction in the temple? Seven years. Seven years to build God's house. How long did it take Solomon to complete construction of his own palace? Thirteen years. Seven years to build God's house, thirteen to build his own. That is when it starts to creep in. The king begins to think of himself before God.

On the one hand, each of us can rest easy because we can say that we are not a king. But we all are. The difference between that time and our time is that we are not the Israelites sitting by helplessly waiting for a king, crying out for someone to lead us. The difference between then and now is that each of us has been anointed king. Whether you want it or not, you have been anointed.

I want you to do something this week. When you are in the car or at home, if you have the radio on listen. Listen to the advertisements. A new condominium complex opening up in the city offering you the "lifestyle you deserve." I heard a commercial for a car dealership yesterday "come in where you're the boss." So we've taken that next step, no longer is it "the customer is always right" NO, *you* are the boss. Because you're the king.

"You deserve a break today," "come on in and have it your way." It's all around us, whether we ask for it or not. I go to Amazon.com. I buy one book. The next time I go back, they have chosen books for me. After all, why should I wade through the books that I want to look at? Just give me the books that I want, because I am the king. Home Depot carries over fifteen-hundred different drawer pulls. I have never been at Home Depot and seen someone standing there going,

“Remove these. These five hundred are unacceptable. Bring me another thousand!” But you could, because you are the king. I am the king. Each of us is king.

Here is the struggle; we are so enmeshed in this, this is such a part of who we are that even when we try to step outside of it, we just add to it.

Shane Claiborne is an author and a member of a community in Philadelphia called *The Simple Way*. They strive, on this one street - Potter Street - to live in Christian community with each other.

He shares this illustration in his book The Irresistible Revolution. He says that he and a group of friends were talking to some wealthy executives about what it means to follow Christ. One of the executives says to him, “I’ve been trying as well to follow Christ’s example in everything I do, and to make sure I’m reminded of it, I had this made.” He rolls up his sleeve to show the W.W.J.D. bracelet on, custom made out of 24 karat gold. What would Jesus do? Custom made, solid gold. I know one thing Jesus wouldn’t do...he wouldn’t wear a solid gold What would I do? bracelet. But he’s trying. He’s trying.

To be honest, none of us would have to roll up our sleeves very far to find something similar. We want to do well, we want to be just. Sometimes we don’t do it to be self-serving; we don’t do it to get the accolades, awards and the name plates, but sometimes we just fall into that anyway.

There’s a movie filmed in Chicago seven years ago called, *Return to Me*. Nice little romantic comedy. The plot really isn’t important for what we are talking about today, but there is a guy in that movie. One of the characters is a contractor and he’s building a new gorilla habitat at Lincoln Park Zoo and the donor who made this new habitat possible likes to hang around the job site. Frequently throughout the movie you will see him saying things like, “Now remember my million dollar donation is completely anonymous. I don’t want anyone to know about my million dollar donation.”

We don’t want to be self-serving. We don’t want to make it about us. Sometimes we trip over our own solid gold bracelets. There is really only one way to get past that. Charity isn’t bad. But charity without justice keeps people fed, but it doesn’t always change their lives. The only way that we can get past that, to really look for a way to bring God’s kingdom here, is to ask questions.

Archbishop Dom Helder Camara, Catholic Archbishop in Brazil in the 70's and 80's is noted for saying, "When I gave hungry people food, they called me a saint. When I asked why the people had no food they called me a communist." Forget about the name calling. We need to ask those questions. Why? Why? If, as our first hymn said, 'God created the world and filled it with food' then why are people hungry? If the medicine exists, then why are people still dying?

Asking why can be dangerous. It is a dangerous because we can only ask why so many times about other people and other places until it comes around to us. Why? Why, if I have so much, are there people who have so little? It's a frightening question to ask, because when that question is asked, it opens me up to a part of myself that is not very pretty. It opens me up to the possibility that though I may not have twelve thousand horses and fourteen hundred chariots, that I have done exactly what Solomon has done and have started to think of myself before God and started to think of myself as more important than God. It is frightening that if we want to move past simple charity, it must be done.

There is something else that happens when we ask those questions. If we begin to ask those questions - "Why this? Why now? Why am I this person?" - we also open ourselves to the possibility, not only to who we are but who we can be. If you believe that this piece of liturgy that we just did a few minutes ago, where we confessed our sins and we were assured of God's forgiveness....if you believe that that was more than ritual and time filler....if you believe that when we confess our sins that God does indeed forgive us and God gives us the chance to be something new and be something different.... then asking those difficult questions becomes a little less frightening. Because we know that there is something better and we have the chance to be a part of that. We have the chance to be part of bringing God's kingdom here now.

Listen to those messages that the world is giving you, anointing you king over and over and over again. Listen to them and after a while, listen to how silly they are and keep listening because even in midst of those messages you can hear God's voice. You can hear God's voice saying, "This can be different and it can be different starting now." Keep listening because in the midst of those messages from the world, in the midst of God's voice you might just start to hear it. You might start to hear that water. Maybe it's not quite that ever flowing stream yet, but you can hear it. Hey, we'll take a trickle right now. You can hear it, because it is coming and we can be a part of it. Amen.