

A Family Divided

Bible Reading:

Amos 1: 11-12

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Our story tonight begins in a tent somewhere in Palestine, according to historians in or about 2006BC. A woman is in the last painful moments of labour. She gives birth to twins, to the ones we know as Esau and Jacob. Of them the Lord said in Genesis 25: *Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated...*

The relationship between those two sons of Rebekah was less than placid, as the subsequent chapters of scripture reveal. There is deception, the threat of murder, tense encounter, more deception.

The two boys grow, each the ancestor of a nation. Esau, also known as Edom because of his red complexion, fathered the Edomites; Jacob, the Israelites. These two clans became neighboring nations, Israel to the north, Edom to the south. They even speak different dialects of the same language.

The Israelites and Edomites - blood kin. In fact, a number of times throughout the Old Testament they are mentioned as such (Num 20.14; Deut 2.4; 23.7; Obad 10, 12). But, like their patriarchs, the history of their relationship is less than cordial. It is filled with constant struggle, plotting and treachery. During the time of the kings it was particularly difficult. Whenever a major power would come against Israel, Edom would lurk as a vulture in the background, trying to pick off some remnant spoils, taking advantage of his brother to the north.

It is this stormy relationship that now becomes the focus of the prophecy of Amos, as he thunders forth the Word of the Lord.

After the introductory words, which we saw last day, Amos begins rendering his prophetic judgements. He does not immediately confront Israel with her sins, however. First he speaks to the surrounding nations - the Syrians, the Philistines, and the Phoenicians. Each has been engaged in some sort of atrocity that is a stench in the nostrils of God.

The Syrians had been very cruel, torturing the Hebrews in the area east of Galilee. Brutality - v.3.

The Philistines had sent whole communities into captivity, as had the Phoenicians, even in spite of a treaty made with the Israelites - v.6

These neighbors of Israel had treated life with contempt, degrading and destroying it. Now they would face the judgement of God for those crimes.

Amos then turns his attention closer to home. No longer is it just neighbors. Now the kinfolk of Israel come under scrutiny. The lion continues to roar, but the roaring is coming uncomfortably close.

Judgement roars for Edom - the cousin of Israel.

And for what does the Lord condemn Edom? Have a look at verse 11-12.

Is it for the fact that she was part of the Phoenician slave-trading (see v.9), a vile offense that would be the downfall of Tyre?

Well, yes that was a travesty, but **NO** it is **NOT** the worst of it all.

In fact, there is no particular event in which Edom was occurred which incurred the tremendous wrath of God.

Rather it was an ongoing **attitude**, a constant lifestyle.

Notice that "the only thing said about Edom is that he is the *constant* enemy of his brother. Edom is accused of suppressing his natural feelings toward blood relations and perpetuating his hatred, refusing to be reconciled with his enemy.

So stubborn was Edom in his anger and his unwillingness to forgive that the prophet Ezekiel later put his finger into the same wound when he declared on God's behalf: '*Because Edom took deliberate revenge on Judah and by so doing incurred lasting guilt...*' (Ezek 25.12)."

[Veltkamp *Farmer From Tekoa* p.43]

Because of Edom's unwillingness to be reconciled the great Edomite fortresses of Teman and Bozrah, the military centres near the Judean border, would be destroyed, and the nation incapacitated.

Consider that carefully, brothers and sisters. The great and evil sin of slave trading is nothing; it is trivial compared to the sin of irreconcilability between brothers.

Notice it - slave trading doesn't even get a by-line,
not so much as a whisper in the judgement against Edom.

What is front and centre?

Hatred of a brother.

Nothing else compares, in God's eyes.

Ah - we are so easy, sometimes to develop little lists, ratings as it were, of the "top 10" sins – those that get us most desperately upset and on the way to action.

Falwell and Robertson did it right after the attack on New York, saying glibly that it was the abortionists, feminists and homosexuals that led to this event to occur as God's judgement.

Lest we point a finger, our Synod at one point rendered a judgement saying how reprehensible it would be for believers to engage in card playing, theatre or dancing.

Shopping on the Sabbath.

Smoking.

Drinking.

They've all been named on that "hit parade" of evil.

But somehow most of us are strangely silent about that which occupies the prophet here -

- lack of forgiveness
- holding a brother or sister in judgement
- resentment and hatred within the family.

Hear the Word of God.

Nothing displeases God more, nothing stirs up holy anger more than kinfolk who quarrel and cannot get along together. [Veltkamp p.44]

And **That**, brothers and sisters, is the message which crosses the 2750 years between Amos and ourselves.

God can't stand hatred, especially when it is between those within a family.

Recall, if you will, some theological background to help us understand the weight of this statement.

From the Old Testament we know of God's judgement against murder.

His condemnation of Cain.

His words to Noah: "*Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man.*"

Human life is the crowning achievement of God's creation. It is a mirror of his divine dignity. And our Lord wants it treated that way. To trample on life, to kill it, is a terrible affront to him.

Then recall what Jesus said in Matthew 5-

that to even **want** to kill life, to belittle it, to hate it
is a terrible affront to the Lord.

In his eyes hatred is equal to murder.

The deed is committed when it is harbored in the heart.

Or the great prayer of Jesus:

forgive us.....

AS WE.....

forgive others.

Or 1 John 4:20: *If you say that you love God, but hold hatred against your brother, you are a.....*
remember the word used there?

liar!!

Hatred is a stench in the nostrils of our Creator.
Especially hatred of a brother!

The prophet Amos is unequivocal about that.

The cross of Christ -

of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, given by a loving Heavenly Father to sinful people in order to reconcile them to himself

- the cross of reconciliation leaves no room for it.

Jesus:

reconciles us to himself while we were yet sinners (Ro 5.8),

loves the unlovable,

forgives the unforgivable.

This is the passion of Jesus' heart:

reconciling humanity to the Heavenly Father

reconciling sinners to each other.

To hold on to hatred

to withhold forgiveness

to nurse bitterness

runs counter to the very heart and passion and purpose of Christ.

It may be all fine and good to speak pious language about loving God, receiving his love, living in that love and the like. But true faith has to get beyond pious language.

Faith has to walk.

It has to come alive.

It has to show.

As far as God is concerned, faith that is just talk is no faith.

You talk about love. You talk about peace.

Yet at the same time you live in turmoil??

That doesn't fit!!

It's fine for you to talk in glowing terms about some unseen spiritual world. But what about the here and now? What about the very real day-to-day things of life? Can you not get them squared away?

Says God, "You say you are a believer. You say I am the basis for your whole existence.

How can that be?

How can it **possibly** be when you, who are supposedly full of my life, and have supposedly tasted of my forgiveness, can't even speak a civil word to your brother? How can you speak of desiring a home in glory, and streets paved of gold, when all you desire for your brother is vileness and revenge?"

Tough words....

Words that make us somberly look at ourselves in the wake of New York and the frightenly easy way that desire for revenge wells up inside.

Words that make us stop and consider how we live in our community - beginning with the community of faith. Calvin CRC has been around for close to 50 years. Long enough for some sad, some regrettable, and some down right shameful events to occur between folk.

In 50 years you can develop a track record.

Grudges and feuds could set in.

Reputations can be built.

Labels can be slapped on each other.

People not darkening each others' doorsteps.

What would Amos say if he were here among us?

What would he say if he saw the track record of our denomination?

Born and bred in schism.

One group after another slicing away, labeling and judging each other in theological terms that often were paper thin veneer coverings over desires to exercise control, gain power or the like.

Groups that to this day can't work together or talk together, even though on paper our theologies and confessions are virtually identical!

Oh, I know -

There's a reason why it happened.

There's always a reason.

Take Jacob and Esau, or Edom.

Jacob was no saint – double-crossing no good cheat. That's what he was.

Edom could have listed any one of a hundred reasons why Israel had it coming.

Yet, hear the prophet.

The sinfulness of a brother, or a sister, does not excuse our own sinfulness.

Two wrongs do not add up to a right before God's throne of judgement.

On this Sunday evening, hear carefully the Word of God.

See the cross at the front -

and hear the call of the Prince of Peace.

Seek His forgiveness.

And then His strength to forgive others; to find healing where relationships are broken – in faith and in family.

For only this will honour God.

Only here will we find life.

21. Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?"

22 Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.

23 "Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants.

24 As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him.

25 Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt.

26 "The servant fell on his knees before him. 'Be patient with me,' he begged, 'and I will pay back everything.'

27 The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go.

28 "But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii. He grabbed him and began to choke him. 'Pay back what you owe me!' he demanded.

29 "His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.'

30 "But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt.

31 When the other servants saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed and went and told their master everything that had happened.

32 *"Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to.*

33 Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?' 34 In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.

35 *"This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart."*

[Matthew 18]

This is the Word of the Lord.