

When I was at Durham Uni a college friend always wanted people to know that he was a son of a diocesan Bishop. Being a member of an Anglican College, he did enjoy some esteem none of the other junior members were entitled to.

Amos said to Amaziah, the priest of Bethel : *'I am no prophet, nor a prophet's son'*; and yet in the Old Testament he is classified as a prophet. Amos is perhaps the first and earliest of the writing prophets. But why would he make such remark if he was a prophet? Was he being humble knowing himself from a narrow upbringing - just an ordinary shepherd?

One wonders what would Jesus' twelve disciples say to the villagers who they were. Most Jews in Jesus' time regarded him as a great prophet, so would they also echo Amos words, 'I am no prophet, nor a prophet's son.' The word 'Son' as Old Testament scholars would tell us, can mean disciple or pupil in the modern sense.

This morning let us learn from this rather neglected prophet of the Old Testament. A prophet is generally known as a person with inspiration. And where is the source of Amos' inspiration? We can think of four sources.

1. As he camped out with his flocks, he would be struck with the starry heaven, and the Psalmist's words would inform him that this is the handiwork of God in nature.

2. As an Israelite and while shepherding his flocks, he would have time to reflect the stories of the great things that Yahweh had done for his people in the past, especially the Exodus.

3. The political scenes of his time - as he stood on the high uplands of Judea, he might have watch the armies of nations marching along the great coast road.

4. His eyes saw and his ears heard the corruption in the wicked cities of both kingdoms of Israel and Judah.

But all these sources of inspiration are available to each of us. What makes Amos a prophet is that, by some special pressure from the hand of God, he was taken away from Judah and became prophet to the northern Kingdom of Israel.

We must not regard Amos' prophecy as simply religious denunciation. It is also political denunciation. We see the same denunciations in the trial of Jesus. We know Jesus suffered from his denunciations. Perhaps in Amos' word to the priest of Bethel, we see him being oppressed.

In the Old Testament we notice the inveterate opposition between the priest and the prophet. There is no intrinsic need for this opposition. Yet the priest stands for the ordered, the well-established in religion; and when it becomes lifeless, the prophet will arise to challenge all this in the name of new insights and sometimes demands for radical changes.

Likewise, there is the contrast between the professional and the amateur. We know in ancient Israel there were 'schools of the prophets', men who seem to have sought an ecstatic inspiration. Amos isn't a graduate from it. He can offer no testimonial, no certificate, nothing but his own intense inner certainty that he has been called by Yahweh to prophesy. How this certainty came to him we cannot exactly say; but for us Christians who truly believe the Holy Spirit is indwelling in our hearts, perhaps we can echo that we also have the irrepressible power within us to say something extraordinary between our relationship with the living God. Inspiration is the word, some may say the apt word to describe the unceasing communication between human beings and God. Jesus is indeed in this sense the supreme inspiration. He is the prophet par excellence.

In chapter 9 the prophet Amos prophesies: *Did I not bring Israel up from the land of Egypt, and the Philistines from Caphtor and the Arameans from Kir?* These are truly inspirational words.

Amos knew that much of the coastland of Palestine was inaccessible to Israel because it was the land of the Philistines, a people of a completely different race and civilization, at one time much stronger than the Israelites. Amos knew that this strange people had come from beyond the sea. But who brought them? Amos had pleaded with Israel in God's name, and in the name of all that God had done for his people. His thought has gone back to the days when Yahweh brought them out of Egypt, when, a weak and trembling people, they entered the promised land (2.9-10). But if God did all this for Israel, who was it who brought the Philistines from over the sea, and gave them their position in the favoured land? Through the mouth of Amos, declares Yahweh: *Did I not bring Israel up from the land of Egypt, and the Philistines from Caphtor?* One may say Amos has a universal perspective of God's saving work.

Fr Ernest Chau's Sermon for Trinity 6, 11 August 2021

The Epistle reading for today in v10 we read: *God has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.*

The challenge for us is: how can we be like Amos, to draw out the conclusion of Paul's huge implication of the Cosmic Christ. Are we not confident to say what Christ has done and achieved on the Cross is not just for the people of Palestine in the first century but also for the people all over world even NOW in the 21st century and in the midst of pandemic?

'I am no prophet, nor a prophet's son'. But this is what I want to say to you: God is always the same, and that all we need to know of him has been revealed to us in Jesus Christ.

Christ has died, Christ has risen. Christ will come again.