

*The Twenty-First Sunday After Pentecost*  
October 21, 2012  
Amazing Grace Lutheran Church – Pastor Chip Wilke

Amos 5:6-7, 10-15

*Seek the LORD and live, or he will sweep through the house of Joseph like a fire; it will devour, and Bethel will have no one to quench it. You who turn justice into bitterness and cast righteousness to the ground...you hate the one who reproves in court and despise him who tells the truth. You trample on the poor and force him to give you grain. Therefore, though you have built stone mansions, you will not live in them; though you have planted lush vineyards, you will not drink their wine. For I know how many are your offenses and how great your sins. You oppress the righteous and take bribes and you deprive the poor of justice in the courts. Therefore the prudent man keeps quiet in such times, for the times are evil. Seek good, not evil, that you may live. Then the LORD God Almighty will be with you, just as you say he is. Hate evil, love good; maintain justice in the courts. Perhaps the LORD God Almighty will have mercy on the remnant of Joseph.*

Silence is golden! At least this is what the old adage says. Isn't this often true? At one time or another, our moms have probably said to us: "If you can't say anything nice it is better not to say anything at all." Silence is truly golden compared to speaking words of bitterness, lies, or gossip. Abraham Lincoln famously said: "**Better to remain silent and be thought a fool than to open your mouth and remove all doubt.**" Silence is golden. We have another example in our text as we read: "*the prudent man keeps quiet in such times, for the times are evil.*" There are times when it is better to bite your lip, be quiet, and even endure persecution if needed.

However, as Solomon writes in Ecclesiastes: "*there is a time for silence and a time to speak.*" There are times when silence is not the right thing. Martin Luther King Jr. once remarked: "**In the end we will remember not the words of our enemies but the silence of our friends.**" God's word also tells us to speak up for those who aren't there to or able to defend themselves. There are times when as Christians we are called to correct, rebuke, comfort and encourage. There are occasions when silence is cowardice and even sin. This morning we are reminded by this Word of God that: **Silence is not always golden! Not when sin is running rampart. Not when there is a merciful Lord.**

Silence is not always golden and that is why about 750 years before Christ was born the Lord called Amos to leave His home in Judah and go to speak to the people of Israel in the northern kingdom. That is why God pulled Amos away from tending his flocks as a shepherd in Tekoa to serve as His prophet who declares the Word of God to straying sheep. The Lord would not remain silent so He sent Amos. He sent Amos with a message of judgment – within a few years the Assyrians would come and conquer. He sent Amos with a message of repentance. He sent Amos because the people of Israel had clearly turned away from their God.

For far too long in the northern kingdom of Israel there was silence. Silence while the Israelites worshipped idols. Silence while people had forsaken the Lord. Silence as widespread crime and injustice made life dangerous and difficult. Sin was

indeed running rampart. Listen to this description of some of the things going on there. ***“You who turn justice into bitterness and cast righteousness to the ground...you hate the one who reproves in court and despise him who tells the truth. You trample on the poor and force him to give you grain. Therefore, though you have built stone mansions, you will not live in them; though you have planted lush vineyards, you will not drink their wine. For I know how many are your offenses and how great your sins. You oppress the righteous and take bribes and you deprive the poor of justice in the courts.”***

The rich and powerful trampled on the poor. Excessive taxes were imposed on farmers. Customers were shortchanged and overcharged. Shameless dishonesty, false scales and measures, selling wheat mixed with dirt and chaff, was how business was conducted. People complained about the prescribed religious festivals because they couldn't do business on those days. Prostitution was practiced in the name of religion. Court systems were corrupt. When people tried to speak the truth they were hated and despised. And the Lord saw it all! ***“For I know how many are your offenses and how great your sins.”***

As sin was running rampart, Amos could not be silent. ***“Seek the LORD and live, or he will sweep through the house of Joseph like a fire; it will devour, and Bethel will have no one to quench it.”*** Amos warns of judgment sweeping through the northern kingdom like a fire. He alerts the rich that though they built stone mansions they will not live in them, and though they have plush vineyards they will not drink their wine – for this judgment is coming soon. There is only one thing left for them to do – seek the Lord. Turn back to the one true God. Repent! ***“Seek good, not evil, that you may live. Then the LORD God Almighty will be with you, just as you say he is. Hate evil, love good; maintain justice in the courts.”*** Breaking the silence is a tough thing to do when sin is running rampart. Yet, this is what Amos does. He speaks the truth - even to a people who despised and hated those who spoke the truth. He pointed out sin. He called the people to repentance – he called for them to worship the Lord once again, and to turn back to the one true God.

And the Lord wants us to do the same. God tells us when we see sinners caught in a sin we are to go show them their fault, privately talk to the person if possible, in an attempt to win them over. God wants us to watch out for attitudes and actions that lead people away from Jesus, away from the one true God. When we see such attitudes and actions the Lord wants us to use His Word to teach, correct, rebuke, and train in righteousness. God wants us to break the silence, especially when sin is running rampart. Silence is not always the loving thing. Jesus did not want the rich man to walk away thinking everything was alright so Jesus spoke the truth and let the man see his sin.

We have trouble on both sides don't we. We don't like it when our sins are made clear. Sometimes we may even despise the one who speaks the truth. And on the other side it is a great challenge to speak the truth and to speak it in love. It is much easier to go along with the crowd than take a stand on God's Word. Who wants to be a prophet like Amos and give a message of judgment? It would be much easier to keep silent. But silence is not always golden! God would not keep silent because He loved these people and wanted them to turn back to Him.

Amos would not keep quiet because He knew the kind of Lord He served. ***“Perhaps the LORD God Almighty will have mercy on the remnant of Joseph.”*** Amos

served a powerful God – the Lord Almighty – the God of hosts. But Amos also knew this God he served was a merciful Lord. What does it mean that the Lord is merciful? Mercy is different than the word grace in a way that you might say it is the opposite side of the same coin. You see while grace by its very definition means that God loves us for no reason at all, out of undeserved love, mercy means God loves us for a reason. But it is not for a good reason, dear friends. God sees how pitiful we are, how miserable, how pathetic; God sees our ugliness, our wretchedness, and our hopelessness. God sees how lost we are in our sins and where our sins are taking us. So God has compassion on us, His heart goes out to us – God is merciful.

Isn't this an amazing truth? God sees our many offenses and how great our sins are, yet the Lord wants us back. The Lord wanted those idolatrous, adulterous sinners in Israel to repent and turn back to Him so He could have mercy on them. What awesome news for us! The Lord's arms are wide open, ready to welcome sinners into them. The truth is God is seeking us, always seeking to call us back to Him through His law and His Gospel. The truth is God sent His one and only Son to seek and save sinners.

Jesus knew exactly when to speak and when to be silent. He spoke the truth about sin – clearing out the temple, confronting the Pharisees, rebuking and teaching His disciples. Then there were times Jesus remained silent, before the Sanhedrin, before Pilate – like a lamb led to the slaughter. For this is the reason Jesus came. Jesus came to redeem us who too often hate the truth and are afraid to speak it. Jesus came to die and enter a tomb. Jesus came to pay the price for sin on the cross. This is where Jesus' compassion led Him and where God's mercy for us sent Him. And there is nothing that breaks the silence like the message of the resurrection. This breaks through the silence that would condemn us all with the good news that our sins are paid for, life with the one true God is ours, and that because He lives we also will live. Silence is not always golden – especially not when we have a merciful Lord.

Perhaps you recall what happened in the tragic incident of March 5, 1770. Most refer to this day by the name of the Boston Massacre and that is all they needed or cared to know. It is true and everyone agreed that on that night eight British soldiers under the command of Captain Thomas Preston fired into a crowd of citizens killing five. As far as the public opinion was concerned the soldiers had *massacred* innocent civilians and deserved to be severely punished as murderers. The cries for justice which went out had nothing to do with a fair hearing for these soldiers. In fact, one lawyer after another declined to defend them. Finally, of all people, John Adams, a well known proponent of the colonial cause against the British took the case. He did it knowing this might cost him his political aspirations, but his conscience would not let him keep silent. Adams took the case and all the defendants were either acquitted or given light sentences when Adams proved they had been provoked. "*Facts,*" Adams said, "*are stubborn things; and whatever may be our wishes, our inclinations, or the dictates of our passion, they cannot alter the state of facts and evidence.*"

Silence is not always golden. God wants His truths to be heard loud and clear. So with God's strength and guidance I pray we speak – the truth about sin – the truth about the Lord's mercy. For Jesus is our Savior who lived and died and lives again for us – our Savior who takes all our sins away – who can remain silent about this? Amen.

