

May 15, 2016 – Pentecost Sunday
God Picks You For His Team
Amos 1:1a & 7:14-15

Amos preached during a time of prosperity, but worship was hollow and injustice filled the land, with the rich trampling the rights of the poor. The book of Amos is a collection of sermons condemning the nations ... for the absence of true worship and the presence of true injustice. ... The last half of the final chapter is a beautiful promise of hope and restoration.

Amos tells us that God despises the exercise of empty religious ritual. Our conduct must always grow from an authentic desire to love others and please Him, and our lives should always produce a true harvest of justice and righteousness.

Our religious practices are worthless unless we treat others with integrity and compassion.

- David Jeremiah, Understanding the 66 Books of the Bible

When I was a kid we'd play stick ball. Do you know what that is? It's a form of base ball but we played in the street not on a field. There were no managers, coaches, or umpires. The foul lines were the curbs and the only equipment we needed was a broom stick and a rubber ball. The ball was pink and we called it a spaldeen, I guess because it was made by Spalding.

If we had enough guys we could run bases, first was the edge of the curb by Mr Phlegers driveway, second was ... whatever we could find for a base, a piece of cardboard, a flattened tin can, and third was the edge of the curb by Tony Gerald's house. One year we asked the neighbors if we could paint bases in the street in front of their house... and they let us. That was cool having permanent bases.

If we didn't have enough guys – say if there was only 4 of us, 2 for each team – then we'd play automatics. If the ball got past the first player it was a single, if the ball got past Mr. Gordard's car on a fly that was a double, past the next tree was a triple and if it got over the second players head and bounced in front of the last house on the block it was a home run.

We pitched to ourselves by throwing the ball up in the air and letting it bounce once, twice, or not at all and then swing at it.

I loved stick ball, I wasn't very good but I love playing.

When we had a bunch of guys we pick sides. There was a leader of each team and they would pick the players they wanted on their team. The way the choosing started

was one of two ways, either we'd shoot for it, that meant someone would call our I've got odds, the other of course would have evens, then it was, "Once, twice, three, shoot." You threw out one finger or two, if the fingers add to an odd number then that person won if even the other won, and it was usually the best out of three.

But sometimes the choosing started by taking the bat – broom stick that someone sawed off their mother's favorite broom because it would make a perfect bat – and throw it up for one of the leaders to catch. Then they went hand over hand and the first to get to the top got first pick. But it wasn't over yet, because sometimes there would be a little nub of the bat still visible on top and if you could grab that nub and twist the bat around your head three times you won the first pick.

Then came the part I dreaded the most, picking the players. Who would be picked to represent their team? We all knew that the best players were picked first, and as the choosing continued and you were not picked yet, the fear of being picked last started to set in. That was usually me.

Except one time, Jerry Ittig won first pick and he chose me. The guys were shocked. I was a transformed player that day. I was playing with confidence, I was getting hits.

I remember when the team I was on was up by two runs. It was the last inning, one out, bases loaded. A line drive was hit, it looked like it would go over my head, the runner on second took off, he was the winning run. I jumped up, caught the ball and stepped on second – a game ending double play. One of neighborhood kids playing on the losing team yelled out, "you can open your eyes now, Bonfig." But Jerry ittig led the celebration lifting me up in the air.

Another time Jerry had to leave early and told me to take his place leading the team for him. Me? I wasn't much of a ball player, I never got to be leader of the team before, but now I was representing Jerry. He called me to represent him. Funny, I always like playing when Jerry Ittig was going to play. And if he had the choice he always picked me for his team.

Now let me talk to you about a man named Amos.

Amos 1:1a & 7:14-15

This message was given to Amos, a shepherd from the town of Tekoa in Judah... Amos replied, "I'm not a professional prophet, and I was never trained to be one. I'm just a shepherd, and I take care of sycamore-fig trees. But the LORD called me away from my flock and told me, 'Go and prophesy to my people in Israel.'

We think of Amos as a prophet, but he says he was not a prophet, never had any formal training as a prophet as a matter of fact he was a shepherd and a farmer, he took care of sheep and fig trees. Yet the Lord picked him, called him to speak on God's behalf to the people of Israel. How could he do it, by what means would he be able to do it?

We think of Christ's disciples, Jesus' followers. They were fisherman, tax collectors, tent makers – ordinary people. Yet the Lord called them to be His representatives. But what means did he leave his disciples?

Today is Pentecost Sunday, it's considered the birthday or beginning of the church. Jesus was crucified, dead, placed in a tomb, then He arose from the dead on what we call Easter Sunday. 7 weeks later or on the 50th day after Easter on a Jewish Feast Day called Pentecost (which by the way means 50th) Jesus sent the Promise of the Father, the Holy Spirit.

Some of you may be thinking, "Oh, you don't believe in that Holy Spirit stuff, do you." You're not Pentecostal are you?" Well, I am Pentecostal, maybe not in the way you might think of Pentecostals, but Pentecostal in the sense that I believe in the filling, the baptism, the saturation of a life with the Holy Spirit. Not only do I believe it, the Holy Spirit is here right now. You may have already felt or heard Him. If you open your heart to Him today you will experience Him like you have never experienced Him before. If you will empty yourself of self, surrender totally to God and ask Him to fill you He will.

In the Old Testament the Holy Spirit was given to particular person at a particular time for a particular purpose. But in these last days He pours out His Spirit on all who believe.

Acts 1:8 Jesus said to His disciples – followers who were ordinary people. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

The Holy Spirit gives us power to be witnesses for Christ.

Power: dunamis (doo'-nam-is) from which we get our English word, "dynamite"; it means miraculous power, force, ability – divine power / ability (to be...)

Witnesses: martus (mar'-toos); "martyr": a martyr will sacrifice anything, even his life for a cause.

When the Holy Spirit comes upon you He gives you divine power and ability to live for the cause of witnessing to people everywhere about Jesus. We witness in two ways with our lives and with our lips. We can tell people about Jesus and we can show them Jesus by the way we live our lives. But we don't do it on our own ability, when we are doing it on our own ability we can become judgmental, we lose the motive of love, and we turn people off. There is something that we need . Jesus said, this is what you are going to need to be my witnesses, don't even try to be my witnesses without this...*the baptism of the Holy Spirit*. That's when His Kingdom comes, and my kingdom goes.

Isn't that something? This is where we start; according to Jesus, this what we need to wage the war of faith, hope and love. Jesus said and says to ordinary people like you

and me: wait! Wait in silent prayer. Wait quietly, wait longingly for Jesus to come to you; to fill you; and empower you and direct you.

Being a Christian includes being sent into the world as a representative of Jesus Christ. God is at work in the world and He wants you to join Him. What is our mission? Introducing people to God.

John 17:18 THE MESSAGE – Jesus was praying for His followers and said, Father... In the same way that you gave me a mission in the world, I give them a mission in the world.

Your purpose, your reason to exist is to know God and bring Him glory. One way you do that is through this mission of making Christ known with your lips and your life – this is part of fulfilling your purpose in life. Want purpose, significance, it starts with God. God calls you. Not just the professional, not just the pastor, the missionary, or the prophet; but the farmer, the fisherman, the CPA, the carpenter, the plumber, the office manager, the construction worker.

The Holy Spirit is calling us to take Jesus to all people. And there is nobody *exactly* like you...and you are where you are, and have the people who come across your path every day because **God chose you to be there in that place at that time for that person.** And all you have to do is Just be who YOU are – and the means by which you can do this and the only means by which you can do this is by the infilling of the Holy Spirit.

Allan Hirsch in his book The Forgotten Ways; gives some examples of the growth of Christianity over the centuries.

Early centuries: In AD 100 there were 25,000 known Christians in the world. In AD 310 there were 20 million. How did they do it? Bear in mind Christianity was illegal, had no buildings, few scriptures, no professional leadership, no seeker sensitive services, no youth groups, worship bands, seminaries, commentaries, and the leaders made it hard for people to join the church.

China: same pattern. When Mao, in 1966, began the purge of religion from society there were 2 million Christians. He banished missionaries, nationalized church property (all churches and church property belonged to the government), killed and imprisoned its leaders, banned public meetings and began to torture Christians. When missionaries were let back into China in the 1980s, (14 years) they found not 2 million but 60 million Christians. They had no clergy, no official leadership structures, no central organization, and no mass meetings—and grew.

How did they do that? They didn't do that, God did!

And God is still at work, but He wants to work through you. And He has given you the weapons that you need. They are not the same weapons the world would use:

2 Corinthians 10:4

We use God's mighty weapons, not worldly weapons, to knock down the strongholds of human reasoning and to destroy false arguments.

Our weapons are not physical like the world would use to be successful, our weapons are divine, mighty, powerful weapons from God.

What are they? They are very simple but profound, and anyone can have access to them, rich/poor, young /old, male /female educated or not.

Here's one weapon: If we are *truly* filled with the Holy Spirit we have the weapon of a "*transformed heart*" and people can tell.

At the District Assembly, Pastor Art Alexander our District Superintendent said:

The power of God is the power of suffering love. Jesus never hit back, he never shamed anyone. He never took the best seats, he had a bias for the people on the bottom; the poor, the weak, the sinner etc. Jesus never blamed anyone for anything...even after his resurrection; he never even spoke about those who crucified him. That's what a transformed heart looks like. Who wouldn't feel safe around him? Who wouldn't open up and be saved?

Has your heart been transformed by the Holy Spirit? People will know when it is. They will see the difference in you – they will see Christ in you. How can you receive the Holy Spirit, you have to give Jesus your life, all of your life, you must yield yourself completely to Him and ask Him to fill you with His Spirit.

Another weapon would be our church being *community of attraction*; when the word gets out that "in that church you will not be judged, you will experience the living Jesus and his radical grace, irreversible forgiveness and acceptance." That's a powerful weapon! When we are a people filled God the Holy Spirit, sold out completely to Jesus, we will be a church like that.

God calls you, do you believe it, He wants to use you and ...

The next time you feel like God can't use you, just remember . . .

NOAH- was a drunk.

ABRAHAM- was too old.

ISAAC- was a daydreamer.

JACOB- was a liar.

LEAH- was ugly.

JOSEPH- was abused.

MOSES- had a stuttering problem.

GIDEON- was afraid.

RAHAB- was a prostitute!

JEREMIAH- and TIMOTHY were too young.

DAVID- was an adulterer and a murderer.

ELIJAH- was suicidal – had problems with depression
JONAH- ran from God.
NAOMI- was a widow.
JOB- went bankrupt.
JOHN- the Baptist ate bugs.
PETER- denied Christ.
THE DISCIPLES- fell asleep while praying.
MARTHA- worried about everything.
MARY MAGDALENE- was, well, you know.
THE SAMARITAN WOMAN- was divorced ... more than once!
ZACCHEUS- was too small.
PAUL- was too religious.
TIMOTHY- had an ulcer ... AND
LAZARUS WAS DEAD!

NOW, what is YOUR EXCUSE?