

July 12, 2009

A little history lesson: Israel was a unified nation for a fairly short period of time. She only had three kings as Israel: Saul, David and Solomon. Before Saul and after Solomon, the north was called Israel, and Bethel served as its capital. It later became Samaria. The south was Judah, and Jerusalem was its capital.

In the first reading today, the priest of Bethel, Amaziah, is sending Amos back to Judah. Amaziah and his king, Jeroboam, had begun to equate faith in the Hebrew God with loyalty to the kingdom. If you were not patriotic, you were disobeying the teachings of God. The only problem is that these national practices were more and more involving pagan ways. The people of Bethel were reportedly involving themselves with prostitutes and paying homage at the alters of pagan gods. Amos foretold of terrible woes that would befall the northern kingdom if it did not change its ways.

When Amos called into question these conflicting practices, he was not received well by those being criticized. Sound a lot like life in this country today?

Amos did not choose to be a prophet. He was a Sheppard from Tekoa who was pressed into service as a prophet by God. He was sent forth, and his message was not welcomed. When Jesus sends forth his 12 disciples in today's gospel – his apostles – he warns them that they may receive the same welcome as Amos. Their call for repentance may cause the apostles' to shake the dust from their feet in testimony against them. But the message Jesus wants his disciples to take into the countryside is the same that God wanted Amos to take to Israel:

Turn back!

Repent!

Be with God!

Amos spoke of three woes, which would befall Israel. Jesus spoke of driving out demons and anointing and healing the sick. It is hard to imagine that anyone would reject the message of Christ under those conditions, but some did. His disciples are here today, calling for conversion. Wanting to drive out demons. Seeking to heal the sick. Put on your sandals and join them.