

**Sunday Morning Worship**  
**Readings, Reflection and Prayers 14<sup>th</sup> July**



**Amos 7.7-15**

This is what he showed me: the Lord was standing beside a wall built with a plumb-line, with a plumb-line in his hand. And the Lord said to me, 'Amos, what do you see?' And I said, 'A plumb-line.' Then the Lord said,

'See, I am setting a plumb-line  
in the midst of my people Israel;  
I will never again pass them by;  
the high places of Isaac shall be made desolate,  
and the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid waste,  
and I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword.'

Then Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, sent to King Jeroboam of Israel, saying, 'Amos has conspired against you in the very centre of the house of Israel; the land is not able to bear all his words. For thus Amos has said,

"Jeroboam shall die by the sword,  
and Israel must go into exile  
away from his land."

And Amaziah said to Amos, 'O seer, go, flee away to the land of Judah, earn your bread there, and prophesy there; but never again prophesy at Bethel, for it is the king's sanctuary, and it is a temple of the kingdom.'

Then Amos answered Amaziah, 'I am no prophet, nor a prophet's son; but I am a herdsman, and a dresser of sycomore trees, and the Lord took me from following the flock, and the Lord said to me, "Go, prophesy to my people Israel."

This is the word of the Lord.

### **Ephesians 1.3-14**

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight he 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.

In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; this is the pledge of our inheritance towards redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory.

This is the word of the Lord.

## **Mark 6.14-29**

King Herod heard of it, for Jesus' name had become known. Some were saying, 'John the baptizer has been raised from the dead; and for this reason these powers are at work in him.' But others said, 'It is Elijah.' And others said, 'It is a prophet, like one of the prophets of old.' But when Herod heard of it, he said, 'John, whom I beheaded, has been raised.'

For Herod himself had sent men who arrested John, bound him, and put him in prison on account of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, because Herod had married her. For John had been telling Herod, 'It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife.' And Herodias had a grudge against him, and wanted to kill him. But she could not, for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he protected him. When he heard him, he was greatly perplexed; and yet he liked to listen to him. But an opportunity came when Herod on his birthday gave a banquet for his courtiers and officers and for the leaders of Galilee.

When his daughter Herodias came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his guests; and the king said to the girl, 'Ask me for whatever you wish, and I will give it.' And he solemnly swore to her, 'Whatever you ask me, I will give you, even half of my kingdom.' She went out and said to her mother, 'What should I ask for?' She replied, 'The head of John the baptizer.' Immediately she rushed back to the king and requested, 'I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter.' The king was deeply grieved; yet out of regard for his oaths and for the guests, he did not want to refuse her. Immediately the king sent a soldier of the guard with orders to bring John's head. He went and beheaded him in the prison, brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the girl. Then the girl gave it to her mother. When his disciples heard about it, they came and took his body, and laid it in a tomb.

## **Reflection – By Margaret Mandrell**

My name is John, known to many as John the Baptist, and I would like to share my story with you.

Our people had spent some 400 years after the prophets had spoken, waiting for God to act. God had rescued us, his chosen people, my ancestors, from slavery in Egypt, bringing them to the Red Sea. Despite being freed from the oppression of slavery and suffering, they were an ungracious people, often complaining, and so were left by God to wander in the desert for 40 years. After that time they were allowed to enter the Promised Land.

The area of wilderness became significant, a vital component of new starts, new beginnings. After Israel's exile in Babylon, the prophets spoke of getting ready a pathway in the wilderness, partly for Israel to come home again, and partly for God himself to come back.

Israel was in deep trouble when I was born. My people were living under the oppressive rule of the pagan Romans. There was collusion and corruption of the local politicians, and we were in debt. A number of groups rose up, hoping and praying that at last Israel's God himself would come and set the people free, and that there would be a time of peace and justice. Those who had a good knowledge of the word of God spoke about the coming of a messiah who would bring salvation.

I was a miracle baby, born to Elizabeth and Zechariah in their old age. They were a devout couple, disgraced by their childless state, despite being so godly. My father was serving his rotation in the Temple as a priest when an angel appeared and announced that their prayers would be answered. The angel said that their son was to be named John and that he would lead many Israelites back to God. This took my father by surprise, and he reacted with disbelief. His scepticism resulted in him not being able to speak. It was only at my circumcision that he regained the ability to talk as he affirmed that my name was indeed to be John.

The name means "The Lord is Gracious" and it was to be so, as I was blessed by God and given a special ministry to perform. Angels visited both my mother Elizabeth, and her cousin, Mary, and they spoke of the

vital role these women were to play not just for the people of Israel, but for all people and for all time. The angel said that I would be filled with the Holy Spirit and that I was to prepare the people for the coming of Jesus.

I prayed and fasted in the desert wilderness near the Dead Sea, and then started preaching and baptising believers in the river Jordan. I preached repentance, a turning away from sin and towards God. I told all who would listen of the coming of the Kingdom. I knew I was not the Messiah, but rather the one who would point towards Him. I baptised with water, but He would baptise with the Holy Spirit and fire. People came to hear my message and fasted and prayed. Both Jesus and I knew we had a significant role to play to fulfil what God had in store for us. For me, it was prayer and fasting, preaching and baptising in preparation for His ministry which was to follow.

I lived very simply, eating locusts and wild honey, whatever I could find. Some thought that I was a wild man, and yes, my beard was bushy and my clothes rough, but this was of no importance. I was motivated and driven by the need to proclaim my vitally important message. Repent, be baptised, prepare for the coming of the Messiah! I told everyone who would listen about the coming of the kingdom. My message was of peace and justice. Some said I came on too strongly, but I was passionate about my message.

One day, Jesus came and asked to be baptised. I was overwhelmed, as He asked me to do this. He, Jesus, the Holy One, the one so long expected and hoped for. It was a moment I will never forget. The Holy Spirit descended on Him like a dove. I knew with great certainty that here was the Messiah, the Lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world.

Some of those who heard me were the religious leaders and they didn't like my challenge to them. This was to bear fruit worthy of repentance. They were arrogant and felt assured of their place as God's chosen people. Jesus also had continuous trouble with them as they felt threatened and sought to get rid of him. He was a compelling speaker,

my cousin, son of Mary, born in a humble stable, but having great authority. The people had flocked to hear me, but they came in even greater numbers to hear him. Sometimes there were thousands there and they were captivated by his simple stories which they could relate to. He told them many things and preached and healed.

Jesus reached out to the poor, the sad, the outcasts and encouraged all who heard to take the risk of faith. He encouraged them to believe, to let go of sin and doubt, and to shine as lights of love. They were to show God's love in action, to implement God's justice and care for creation. As for me, the child of aged, devoted parents who served God faithfully, my job was done. I had fulfilled the role God had given to me. I may have been a loner, an outsider, and not popular or comfortable with people in the way Jesus was, but I am content. My message was uncompromising and hard for some to accept. I am comforted in knowing that I was there when Jesus came to be baptised, and that he chose me to perform this act of submission to God's will. I was able to prepare the way for his ministry, my Lord and my Messiah. I have borne witness to the new covenant, so long awaited.

The end of my story is brutal but inevitable. Herod Antipas had his brother murdered as he wanted to marry his wife. I condemned his behaviour and knew it was only a matter of time before he would act. I am a prisoner, I think in the fortress of Machaerus and the guards who are kind to me have said he is going to behead me because I condemned his divorce and remarriage. Herodias has always wanted to have me killed but Herod had protected me because he knew I was righteous and holy. He did listen to me. Anyway, the end came at a birthday party when Herod offered his daughter anything she wanted. The girl, encouraged by her mother, asked for my head. This is the end for me, but I have been faithful to the task God assigned to me, and I am secure in the knowledge that the prophecies have been fulfilled by the coming of the Messiah.

## **Prayers**

In humility and love  
let us draw near to our God  
and pray to him now.

To the bidding: Lord hear us  
Please respond: Lord graciously hear us.

Lord hear us:

**Lord graciously hear us.**

Lord God, we pray that our lives  
maybe upright and holy;  
that our church communities may shine  
with goodness and love, humility and truth;  
we pray for all leaning lives to be straightened up  
through your merciful forgiveness.

*Silence*

Lord hear us:

**Lord graciously hear us.**

Lord God, we pray that we  
may be empowered to recognise evil  
and fight against it;  
to discern your warnings and speak them out;  
to notice the sparks of love and goodness  
and celebrate them.

*Silence*

Lord hear us:

**Lord graciously hear us.**

Lord God, we pray that our households  
and neighbourhoods,  
our places of work and leisure,  
may be arenas of praise and thankfulness,



not only in the comfort zones  
but particularly through the disturbed  
and difficult times.

*Silence*

Lord hear us:

**Lord graciously hear us.**

Lord God we pray for those  
who are persecuted for their faith,  
for those in prison;  
those caught up in cruel and violent lives;  
for all victims of oppression or abuse;  
and for all who suffer mental anguish or physical pain.

*Silence*

Lord hear us:

**Lord graciously hear us.**

Lord God, we pray for all who are in any kind of sickness,  
trouble or need. From our own community we pray especially for:  
Leon and Valda Bailey, Joyce Pringle, Ann Hunt, Anuwat Wanggane,  
Joan Tyson, Alan Coe, Jack Tubby, Rob & Lucy, Roger Jones, Patricia Ash,  
Jason Thomson, Ryan Day, Brenda Hulland, David New, and Adrina and  
Alan Price.

May they know the constancy of your love  
and your infinite desire to heal.

*Silence*

Lord hear us:

**Lord graciously hear us.**

We remember those who have recently died:

And we pray for all who mourn.

We remember with love and gratitude those whose anniversary of death  
falls at this time: Edwin Hulme, Freda Keightly, Reg Pritchard, Stanley &

Elvina Kennett, Mary Pritchard, Alan Dugdale, Barbara Embelin, Gordon Neal and Joy Cox.

May they rest in peace and rise in glory.

*Silence*

Lord hear us:

**Lord graciously hear us.**

Lord God, you have blessed us  
with every spiritual blessing;  
enable us by your power to be true to our calling  
and live holy and blameless before you all our days.

Merciful Father,

**accept these prayers  
for the sake of your Son,  
our Saviour Jesus Christ.  
Amen.**