

Entrenched.

The definition of entrenchment is: the process by which ideas become fixed and cannot be changed.

That feels like a good word for times such as these.

Our nation is divided - with people entrenched in positions  
for or against the police,  
for or against protests of police killings of black men and women,  
for or against immigrants,  
entrenched for or against Hillary and Donald,  
for or against Israel or Palestine,  
for or against evangelicals, liberals, conservatives  
entrenched for or against Christianity, Judaism, Islam or nothing,  
for or against Native Americans or oil pipelines.  
We are entrenched politically, socially,  
theologically and economically.

It feels that the entrenchment is like it never has been before,  
paralyzing Congress,  
bringing apathy to masses who throw up their hands in  
surrender to the loudest voices and public airwaves.

Entrenchment is dangerous.  
Entrenchment cuts off the ability to listen with an open heart,  
the ability to listen for what drives the person with  
a different opinion or position we can't  
possibly understand they have taken.  
Entrenchment can be fueled by  
fear, greed and attachment.  
Entrenchment makes it hard to see God,  
God's ways,  
God's pursuit of justice,  
and God's mercy.

Our lessons today help us see God for times such as these.

Let's start with Amos.

The background on Amos is that he prophesied in the 8th century B.C.E. in Israel.

At the time Israel was a divided kingdom.

It seems that after King Solomon died, the tribes of northern Israel refused to follow his successor and split off.

So in Amos' time we have the southern kingdom called Judah and the northern kingdom of Israel.

Each kingdom was entrenched in their own way of belief and tradition, convinced that they were right and the ones with truth on their side, and the one true religion.

Amos was from the south, but God called him to prophesy in Israel, the northern kingdom.

Interestingly however, today's reading in particular is addressed to both the northern and southern kingdoms.

Both have become entrenched against the Lord's ways and judgment is coming.

Amos accuses the people in Jerusalem and Samaria – capitals of the northern and southern kingdoms - of being entrenched in wealth and luxury AND entrenched in the notion that as God's people, no harm can come to them, and they have no responsibility to anyone, not even God.

When Amos asks, do you not see the danger gathering at our borders?

The people say, eh, we're God's chosen people, God will protect us.

God's people, huh, Amos says,  
well let me give you a picture of your current  
life of faith as individuals and a community.

You sleep on beds, while others sleep in dirt,  
you eat the finest meats, while others eat none,  
you amuse yourselves with nonsense music,  
drink wine by the bowl and primp and groom with the finest products,  
but you don't care about those who have no food to eat,  
rags for clothing, little or no work and sleep in the dirt.

In short those who had been rescued from  
slavery in Egypt and led to the Promised Land,  
have forsaken their duties as God's people.  
Those entrusted to caring for the life of those in the land of Israel  
had been corrupted and  
were indifferent to everyone but themselves.

And, Amos who has interceded on behalf of the people before  
to stop God's judgment now says,  
You who do not care will be the first to be carried off into exile,  
you will be at home no longer,  
your preoccupation with yourselves,  
the status quo and the good life will end.

In Amos, God has been crying out for the poor and deprived,  
seeking a just system, compassion and equality for all.

And, in Luke's Gospel, the rich man is entrenched in his ways,  
and Lazarus is trapped, unable to change the system, and eating scraps.  
The rich man fears his brothers are entrenched in their way of life,  
their beliefs and asks Abraham to  
send someone to them to  
change their hearts and minds.  
But Abraham says, if they don't listen to Moses and the prophets,  
they are entrenched,  
someone rising from the dead won't change their minds either.

And, I wonder, what would it take?  
What would it take for the rich brothers to really see another Lazarus?  
Or to really see their participation in  
keeping Lazarus eating scraps at the gate?

What will it take for this entrenched country to  
be a land of equality,  
respectful disagreement,  
engaged, and open discourse  
becoming one working together to care for God's people?

Here are words of Amos for us at times such as these<sup>1</sup>:

"Woe to those who go to sleep at night on their Therma-rest mattresses  
and stretch themselves out on  
leather couches watching flatscreen televisions,  
who eat leg of lamb and ribeye steaks from Whole Foods,  
who stream Coldplay on their iPhones,  
who drink wine from stemless goblets,  
and get a massage twice a month,  
but are not grieved over the senseless killing of black lives.

They will be the first to go into exile."

Exile – Exile means to be away from one's home.  
As people of God, to abide with God means to be at home with God.

In exile we are away from home,  
separated from God, where there is suffering and pain.

Brothers and sisters, don't get hung up on whether you are rich or poor.  
As people of faith, rich **and** poor, and everywhere in between,  
we are part of the problem.  
We do become entrenched.  
When we are entrenched, we cannot be used by God,  
we are not at home with God.

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<sup>1</sup> Honig, Pastor Jim; Facebook post Sept. 21, 2016

There are some in Charlotte, NC who are not at home with God.  
Not at home with God are those who support systemic violence  
against people of color,  
those who criticize the peaceful protesters and  
who disrespect the Black Lives Matter Movement.

In the words of Rev. William Barber<sup>2</sup>,  
the protests in Charlotte are not black against white,  
not black against the police –  
the protests are against an unjust systems and violence.

As people of God, we are called to fight for justice.  
Black, brown, white, every person is being called to stand up against  
systemic racism and violence,  
oppression and fear.

What we learn about God from Amos and the rich man and Lazarus  
is that God is fighting for and demands that we pursue justice.

Rather than get entrenched rich vs. poor,  
right vs. left,  
liberal vs. conservative,  
let us seek to be at home with God,  
to come out of exile,  
to cross the giant chasm that separates suffering, injustice and peace.

In Amos, Abraham, Moses, the prophets and Jesus,  
God crosses that chasm.

Jesus longs to lead us across the chasms in this nation,  
let us follow,  
let us be at home in God.

Then all the people of Charlotte, Ferguson, Topeka, NY city,

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<sup>2</sup> Barber II, William, The New York Times, Sept 23, 2016

Amos 6:1a, 4-7  
1 Timothy 6:6-19  
Luke 16:19-31

Entrenched.

19<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost  
First Trinity Lutheran Church  
Pastor Wendy Moen

then people in all the cities of God  
will be at home again.

Let it be so. Amen.