

I don't know if this will serve as a ringing endorsement for why you should come to Bible study or if it will chase all of you away thinking that we are a really odd group of God's children who don't know what we're talking about, but go with me here for a second, and bear with your siblings who go to Bible study because they may laugh. How many of you in the last I don't know, six months, have had a hot dog? Uh huh, a hot dog, I told you, go with me here. How many of you have had a hot dog? It's kind of quintessential Americana, right? Hot dogs, apple pie, and baseball. And let's be real, there is nothing like being out at a baseball game with just a simple, straightforward hot dog, but these things are tricky aren't they? Because which one of us hasn't weighed the question of, do I really want to spend at least eight bucks on a hot dog that may or may not actually be a legit, all beef, you know exactly what you're getting hot dog? I mean, hot dogs are the prime example of the phrase, you don't want to know how the sausage gets made, right? You never quite know what's inside.

Ok, what in the world do hot dogs have to do with the Word of God? Amazingly...something. I want you to imagine going to the grocery store, and you're standing in front of the hot dog case, there are a world of options before you. You've got your turkey dogs, your all beef dogs, and your generic, no clue what is in them franks. You have to weigh your costs, do

you pay the exorbitant price for the hot dogs where you know what you're getting? Or because grocery prices are astronomical enough as it is, do you just grab the franks, take the cheaper cost, and try not to think about what you're consuming? For each of us the answer is probably going to be different, but what if...what if you opt to absorb the higher cost of the all beef dogs, because you trust that that's what you're getting, you pay the ridiculous price, and then...you find out...it's all a sham? You paid all beef prices for a don't ask what's in here frank? How would you feel? Annoyed? Taken advantage of? Angry? And this is where the word of God meets us today at the intersection of all beef hot dogs and franks.

Of all the prophets, Amos is the one most oriented towards social justice, and he doesn't pull any punches when he is speaking to God's people because he needs them to hear in straightforward, no nonsense words just what kind of world they are creating in comparison to the type of world God has called them too. Amos is the one that tells the people that God doesn't care for, in fact *hates*, their empty, ritualistic festivals of worship because they aren't backed up by compassionate care for their neighbor when they leave the temple. Amos is the prophet quoted by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., proclaiming that justice needs to roll down like waters and righteousness like an everflowing stream, proclaiming that the focus for

God's people needs to be on their actions towards the rest of humanity, rather than on what they do for themselves or what looks good in public.

And this morning we find Amos decrying poor, shoddy, underhanded business practices that only seek to line to pockets of the rich and take advantage of the poor. It's Amos' message in a nutshell and it isn't pretty.

Amos is speaking to God's people in the northern kingdom of Israel. This is long before the exile to Babylon, when God's people are divided and torn, assailed from multiple directions by foreign adversaries. Amos has looked around at the way God calls God's people to act and how they actually are acting and he cannot believe his eyes. He sees and hears people complaining about religious festivals and the importance of the Sabbath, because when those things are observed that means that, heaven forbid, their workers get a day off!! How dare the people who quite literally slave away for them get one ounce of respite, because if they aren't working then their employers/masters/bosses, choose your noun, don't make any money. God's people are literally complaining about the God given gift of the Sabbath because it's a day they can't force people to work and make money for them that they certainly don't put back into the hands of their workers.

That's bad enough on its own, but it just keeps getting worse. Amos describes business practices of messing with the weight of money so that

people are overcharged, having to give more of their money for less. A practice that is adamantly decried in the law of God. They falsify their books and do whatever they can do take advantage of those who already have little to claim as their own. They don't care that they're taking away from those who have nothing, as long as it means that they get more, that their pockets are more full, that their lives are comfortable. Silver and fancy pair of shoes are more important to them than the lives of their neighbor and Amos cannot believe his eyes. And yet, there's one more thing he has witnessed and it is just as astounding and it is where the hot dogs come in.

You know how Jesus always makes comments about God separating the wheat from the chaff? The useable portion from the waste? It's a common practice in agriculture. In order for wheat to be properly processed for consumption, you have to separate the bud of the wheat from the chaff that surrounds it, which usually gathers on the floor and is thrown out or used for other purposes besides eating. Amos says that he has been witness to people mixing the chaff, the sweepings of the wheat into the wheat itself and still selling it as full priced, all wheat, wheat. The equivalent of paying for a self-proclaimed all beef hot dog and getting a mish mash of other stuff instead, but not getting your money back.

Of all the things which Amos describes this one feels the most unsettling because it's taking advantage of the most basic human need: the need for safe, sustainable sustenance. At the end of the day, I think we can all agree that every single person is deserving of food. Food that is healthy, clean, safe, and enjoyable. This is what the people of Amos' time are playing on. They know people need wheat. They need it for bread, for flour, for porridge, for any number of things that provide the basic building blocks of their nutrition, and rather than making sure their neighbors have a steady, healthy supply of it, the rich are cutting it with chaff so they can make more money and have more product to dole out. It's despicable, and it is certainly not an example of God's heart, God's love, God's justice.

Amos is dealing with people who would proclaim themselves to be God's people. They would worship every week, say their prayers, proclaim the right words, but their actions are in direct opposition to what they profess to believe. They are the embodiment of what Jesus concludes at the end of the gospel, you cannot serve God and wealth. You cannot serve two masters. If your heart lies with your wealth, then it cannot also lie with God. If your money is more important than the good of your neighbor, if you're willing to take advantage of your neighbor to get more for yourself, then you cannot say that your heart also rests with God. If you're willing to ignore

the needs of your neighbor in order to reap benefits you probably don't even really need that much, then you cannot say that your heart is directed towards God and God's word. Your heart cannot be divided in such a way.

For how many of us does this message ring just a little too true? I would guess more than we would care to admit. How many of us when seeking to provide food for those in need opt for the cheapest, most generic option possible even if we know that that is never something we would buy for ourselves? How many of us have had the thought of, they should just be grateful for what they're getting? We aren't considerate of the chemicals, the additives, the "frank" like ingredients that we willingly give to our neighbors, even though we would never do that for ourselves.

How many of us when seeing a person in need take note of if they have a cell phone and the type it is, if they have a car, if they seem to have things that we think they shouldn't have because if you're poor well then you shouldn't have those things and if you have those things well then clearly I don't need to help you all that much because you're just trying to take advantage? All the while we know nothing of their circumstances, what has happened to them, whether or not they're holding that cell phone knowing that come the next month they can't afford it anymore?

How many of us have criticized celebrities and multimillionaires for the decisions that they make because isn't that just a ridiculous use of their money, when, ok the degree of wealth might be different, but to a person with significantly less than us, wouldn't they think, it's ridiculous to have two, three, maybe four TVs in your house? That you have enough food that sometimes you have to clean out your cupboards and throw food away unopened because you forgot about it or never found a use for it? That you would rather drive the two minutes to the grocery store than walk because it's more convenient and eh, gas is expensive but our time is more precious.

When we are willing to look at our lives with eyes wide open, no rose-colored glasses, no sugar coated denial and excuses of the choices we make, we realize that the gospel, the word of God calls each of us to account for the ways in which we mix the chaff in with the wheat, sell franks under the name of all beef hot dogs. It's up to each of us to decide how we are going to direct our heart, whether we're going to let it remain divided or if we are finally going to decide one and for all that we serve God and God alone, even when serving God calls us out of our comfort zones and our comfortable lifestyles. Justice and equity are not something that we can just pick and choose our way through. We have to decide are we going to worship at the feet of our wallets, or serve a God who is God of all? **AMEN!**