

SERMON FOR SEPTEMBER 25, 2022

TEXT: AMOS 6:1-7

THEME: PLAYING BY THE RULES

Woe to those who are at ease in Zion, **4** “Woe to those who lie on beds of ivory and stretch themselves out on their couches, and eat lambs from the flock and calves from the midst of the stall, **5** who sing idle songs to the sound of the harp and like David invent for themselves instruments of music, **6** who drink wine in bowls and anoint themselves with the finest oils, but are not grieved over the ruin of Joseph! **7** Therefore they shall now be the first of those who go into exile, and the revelry of those who stretch themselves out shall pass away.”

In the name of Jesus:

When I was a kid, I played card games with my Grandma Davidson, the card game called Canasta. I can't recall the rules, but back then, when I was a child, I had a hard time remembering the rules. My patient Grandma would remind me of the rules of the game, but I didn't really pay attention to them, until something in the game went wrong. Whenever I played the wrong card Grandma would remind me of the rules. We always would play by the rules.

Some people play different games, whether they be card games or board games, without any attention to the rules. They may read the rules at the beginning of the game, but don't pay attention to them unless something goes terribly wrong. Something has to be at stake before they as players would consult the rules. If something is done in the game that causes an unfair

result, the rule book is consulted. Rules rule, and players who play the game make their case and base their case for victory on the basis of the rules. When you play by the rules, you can take pride in winning the game.

Life is not a game, but there are rules to follow in life. What Amos reminds us today is that God not only makes the rules but He also expects us to keep the rules in this thing called human life.

The prophet Amos proclaims a message, one which calls on those in the Church to Wake Up! Amos preached to the people of the Northern Kingdom of Israel in the Old Testament. The spiritual state of the people of God is deplorable. Those who were members of the Church at that time were more concerned about their own well being, were all about meeting their own needs, of taking care of themselves, than they were of changing their behavior and following the Lord. They loved the lives of pleasure that they lived, they enjoyed meals that had the finest of foods, they lived lives of luxury while forgetting what it meant to be called God's people. Listen to Amos' words: "Woe to those who lie on beds of ivory and stretch themselves out on their couches, and eat lambs from the flock and calves from the midst of the stall, **5** who sing idle songs to the sound of the harp and like David invent for themselves instruments of music, **6** who drink wine in bowls and anoint themselves with the finest oils, but are not grieved over the ruin of Joseph! **7**

Therefore they shall now be the first of those who go into exile, and the revelry of those who stretch themselves out shall pass away.”

Amos, and the other faithful prophets of God had called the people of God to repent, to change their behavior, to change their lives. To live by God’s rules. But God’s people of old were not content with the material blessings that God had given to them. They, instead, wanted more. They wanted things that were better. Their desires grew and the people wanted their desires met. They became greedy, arrogant, and apathetic to the needs of others and the Word of God. So much so that many neglected God and His Word and thereby lost their faith. Amos warned the people to repent before it was too late. You need to play by the rules. But God’s warning was not heeded. The nation of Israel went into exile. God had cut Himself off from His people.

God warns His Church, He warns you today about having your priorities straight. God calls you to remember His Law. He calls you to love God first and foremost, to have no other gods. But what happens? To paraphrase what Paul says in our Epistle lesson for today, we are tempted to fall in love with money and possessions at the expense of losing our relationship with the Lord. Jesus addresses this by telling us that no one can serve God and money, either you will love the one and hate the other. But do we listen? Do we care? Do you take heed of what God is saying, or do you let it go in one ear and out the

other? Are we willing to listen to God's Law, His rules, or do we ignore them at our own peril?

I fear that the Church today is afflicted with the malady of apathy. Many in the Church, and this is true of many in our congregation, for some have grown tired and are apathetic to what God has to say. There is a lack of hunger for the Word of God, little priority to serve in the Church and through the Church. What has become important for people today is that they want to live comfortably instead of serving God. Like the rich man in the story of Lazarus, many seek to live lives of pleasure and luxury rather than reaching out to those around them who are hurting. We at times are more interested in the things of the world than the things of God and the needs of others. .

But is this the way of Christ? Is this how Jesus has treated you? Can you imagine if Jesus, in seeing you in your sinful state, reacted by saying, "I don't want to get involved, I don't want to die for you, you are getting what you deserve as a sinner, so why should I care?" What would your response be if, when you prayed to God to intervene and answer your request, if God were to say: "So what? That's not my problem?"

Thanks be to God this isn't how God treats the sinner, thanks be to God this is not how God responds. God doesn't give you what you deserve, rather, He treats you graciously in Jesus. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift

of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ. All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, but you have been saved by a free gift of God, by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ, so that your boasting may be of all what God has done for you in Jesus. God's love for you has been already demonstrated, He has already shown to you that He cares, for while you were still a sinner, Christ came to keep the rules, God's Law that you can't keep and won't keep. Jesus died for you, He rose from the grave for you, to forgive you, to give you a new life to live.

God has given to you this new life in Baptism. You don't belong to yourself, you belong to God, so that you can, by the power of the Spirit, live according to God's rules, by showing that you love God by showing that you care for those around you. Paul encourages each of us to: "Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness. **12** Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called... don't set your hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. **18** Do good, be rich in good works, be generous and ready to share, **19** thus storing up treasure for you as a good foundation for the future, so that you may take hold of that which is truly life. "

God has given to you a new life in Jesus. How will you choose to live it? Will you choose to live your life in freedom to meet your own needs, or will

you use your freedom to serve others? Paul Harvey, the newsman for the ABC radio network, used to tell the following story every year on the Saturday before Easter.

Boston preacher Dr. S. D. Gordon placed a beat up, bent, rusted old bird cage besides his pulpit and then told the congregation this story: "An unkempt, unwashed, little lad about 10 years old was coming up the alley swinging this old caved in bird cage with several tiny birds shivering on the floor of it. Dr. Gordon asked the boy where he got the birds. He said that he trapped them. Dr. Gordon asked what he was going to do with them. The boy replied that he was going to play with them and have fun with them. Dr. Gordon then said: "Sooner or later you will get tired of them, then what will you do with them?" The boy answered: "I have some cats at home, I will just feed them to the cats, they like birds."

Dr. Gordon said: "Son, how much do you want for those birds?" The boy was surprised, hesitated and then replied: "Mister, you don't want these birds, they are just plain old field birds, they can't sing, they are ugly." The preacher said: "Just tell me, how much do you want?" The boy thought for a moment and said: "Two dollars?" To the boy's surprise, Dr. Gordon reached into his pocket, and handed the boy two one dollar bills. The preacher took the cage, and the boy in a flash hurried up the alley. Then, in a sheltered crevice

between the buildings, Dr. Gordon opened the door of the cage and tapping on the rusty exterior, he encouraged the little birds, one at a time, to find their way out through the narrow door and fly away. Then, having accounted for the empty cage beside his pulpit, the preacher went on to tell what seemed, at first, a separate story.

About how once upon a time, Jesus and the Devil had engaged in a negotiation. Satan had boasted how he'd baited a trap in Eden's Garden and caught himself a world full of people. "What are you going to do with all those people in your cage?" Jesus wanted to know. The Devil replied: "I'm going to play with them, tease them, make them marry and divorce and fight and kill one another, then I am going to teach them to throw bombs on one another, then I am going to have fun with them. "

Jesus said:" You can't have fun with them forever. When you get tired of playing, what are you going to do with them." The Devil said: "Damn them. Kill them!" Jesus said: "How much do you want for them?"

Satan said: "You can't be serious? If I sell them to you, they will just spit on you, they will hate you, they will hit you and beat you. They will hammer nails into you. They are no good."

Jesus asked, "How much?" Satan said: " All of your tears and all of your blood. That is the price." So Jesus took the cage, paid the price, and opened the door.

Dear brother and sister in Christ, you are free! God cared so much for you that He sent Jesus to live, die and rise again for you. You are free now to live your life to serve others, to show that you care, through acts of love and devotion to others. That is what living according to God's rules looks like, loving Him first and foremost, then living your life in service to others. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

To God's glory and in Jesus' name.

Amen