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"Another Opportunity"

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Deuteronomy 30: 9-14 (9-10). ⁹ Then the LORD your God will make you most prosperous in all the work of your hands and in the fruit of your womb, the young of your livestock and the crops of your land. The LORD will again delight in you and make you prosperous, just as he delighted in your ancestors, ¹⁰ if you obey the LORD your God and keep his commands and decrees that are written in this Book of the Law and turn to the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.

¹¹ Now what I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you or beyond your reach. ¹² It is not up in heaven, so that you have to ask, "Who will ascend into heaven to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?" ¹³ Nor is it beyond the sea, so that you have to ask, "Who will cross the sea to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?" ¹⁴ No, the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it.

Introduction: I want to begin with a personal confession. As I wrestled the past couple of weeks on which lectionary text to preach today, I intentionally avoided the Amos 7:17 passage. I was already familiar with the writings of the prophet Amos, and I knew there was not any good news, because Amos would proclaim to Israel their inevitable captivity by Assyria, AGAIN, because of their disobedience to God. And to be frank, after sharing the prophetic words of Elijah from the 1 Kings 19 text the past TWO times I preached, I really did not want to go there, again. So when I read this Deuteronomy text coming from chapter 30:9-14 that I read earlier, I thought, "My God, some hope for both Israel and us today," and I even chose another, less-provoking thumbnail as the image for the week.

But as I began to exegete, to unpack this scripture, this supposed passage of hope was tucked between some hard truths and some severe consequences that God had laid out for Israel. Because God already knew that his sons and daughters, his people would only **momentarily** surrender to God's will. That they would go right back to business as usual and get caught up in their will over and above God's command to worship God and God only.

Scripture Passage: Deuteronomy 30: 9-14 I really am just going to focus on verse 9 and mostly 10 of this 30th chapter because there is more in this text than we have time for. But I encourage

you to read chapter's 29, 30 and 31 so you can see how this all plays out. But in the 9th verse, the writer proclaims that the Lord your God will make you abundantly prosperous in all your undertakings. In everything you do. Your **bodies** will be fruitful, your **livestock** will be fruitful, your **land** will be fruitful... and God will take delight in prospering you just as he did your ancestors. Finally some GOOD News? That GOD will prosper Israel and their children and their livelihoods and their land just as God did the generations before them. God is giving Israel **ANOTHER OPPORTUNITY.**

PROSPERITY COMES WITH CONDITIONS

BUT, there is a condition in verse 10 so I am going to spend the bulk of our time together fleshing all of that out in the fullest context possible. And so, the condition for Israel's prosperity comes and **ONLY** comes "when Israel obeys the Lord and Israel follow God's commandments (these are NOT God's suggestion, these are NOT God's recommendation, but a **command** to obey God, follow GOD's lead and TURN to the Lord with all of their heart and with all of their soul.) **AND** when they have met these conditions, **THEN** prosperity comes! **BUT here's the problem ISRAEL, here's the problem children of God, here's the problem for US.**

Our obedience to God is only for a moment. It is short lived. It doesn't LAST. It is not CONSISTENT. Israel has this perpetual pattern that after God chastises them for following other Gods, they shift, and move closer to God, practice a real and felt sense of community with one another, but when prosperity comes, when they have more than enough...more than enough to eat, more than enough profit from their businesses, more than enough land, more than enough protection from warring neighbors, when they are blessed with children and grandchildren they go right back to putting everything and everyone else above God...Go RIGHT back into worshipping idol Gods.

ISRAEL CAN'T SEE THE TRUTH

But the most DANGEROUS part about their condition is, **THEY CANNOT SEE IT!** They are blinded from their own sin. They have developed a practice of doing things their way for so

long, not only do they believe that they are right, but they have this self-righteous demeanor, and raise themselves just a little higher than their neighbors, see their morals as just a little better than everyone else around them, because after all, THEY are the chosen, BLESSED people of GOD. So, they cannot SEE the truth of what they have become.

Illustration: I was reading an excerpt in the Huffington Post and when I clicked the link, this image of the blind-folded eagle, the thumbnail image that we used this week, appeared and I couldn't shake that image loose. The full article was published by the "Atlantic" magazine, and was entitled, *America Is in Denial*- with the subtext "Too many Americans are blithely dismissing threats that could prove cataclysmic." **By Mitt Romney.**

Now I don't usually read or quote a white, male, Republican, but there were some raw truths in Senator Romney's article that echoed the warnings from the prophet Elijah and Amos in our lectionary text this week, about **Israel's** idolatry and resistance to the truth.

And the more I read today's Deuteronomic text, it was clear that the message was the same. LORD here we go again! Even though this generation of writers were adapting the Torah, the law, to their current context, the **people** really had not changed. Israel was repeating the same patterns of disobedience toward God that their ancestors and the generations before them had committed. AGAIN, they were worshipping other gods, AGAIN they are mistreating the poor, the orphaned and widowed, AGAIN they refuse to hear or SEE the truth about their sinful condition.

When we looked at 1 Kings: 19-Ahab and Jezebel loathed Elijah because he confronted them with the truth of their sins of greed and coveting and murder. In the 7th chapter of Amos found in in this week's lectionary, Amaziah, who was the royal priest, was more committed to the House of Jeroboam and his own prosperity than he was to Bethel, "The House of God". So, when Amos showed up Amaziah did not want to hear or SEE the TRUTH from GOD. And now... AGAIN... the PEOPLE of Israel have been and will be in the following chapters in the same condition... rejecting the truth of their SIN against GOD, against humanity and eager to believe a LIE rather than the truths of GOD.

And then there is US, we who identify as AMERICAN, who claim to be Christian, to be followers of Jesus Christ, WE are in the SAME sinful condition as Ahab and Jezebel, and Amaziah, and Israel. Thousands of years later, but the same condition. And God was not surprised by their rejection of God OR the Truth in the Old Testament, and if you fast-forward to this week's NT passage in Luke 10- the sinful condition of God's people is alive and well in the Priest and the Levite who don't want to see what they see. So, they pretend this man who is beaten and bloodied on the side of the road is not there.

And Paul writes to Timothy (2 Timothy 4:3-Amplified Version) *For the time will come when people will not tolerate sound doctrine and accurate instruction [that challenges them with God's truth]; but wanting to have their ears tickled [with something pleasing], they will accumulate for themselves [many] teachers [one after another, chosen] to satisfy their own desires and to support the errors they hold.*

What ERRORS do we hold today? It is now 2022 when Senator Romney writes, "President Joe Biden is a genuinely good man, but he has yet been unable to break through our national malady [our sickness, our cancer] of denial, deceit, and distrust. A return of Donald Trump would feed the sickness, probably rendering it incurable. Congress is particularly disappointing: Our elected officials put a finger in the wind more frequently than they show backbone against it. Too often, Washington demonstrates the maxim that for evil to thrive only requires good men to do nothing."

And I have to agree that there are a lot of GOOD men, women, siblings in congress, on City Councils, County Commissioners, and yes in our CHURCHES doing NOTHING about the cancer of denial, deceit and subsequently distrust rooted in a white supremacy culture that works OVERTIME to keep us all from truly SEEING. Seeing ourselves and seeing the world around us. And so, I am encouraged by the apology to African Americans that was issued at the PCUSA General Assembly in their Litany of Repentance. But I am also cautious!

How much are you willing to see and how long are you willing to see it? Because when it gets hard and heavy and your emotions and your grief and your own trauma start welling up in

you, will you stay the course? Will the standards of truth and justice of GOD be your plumb line, the way you measure where you really are, or will whiteness be your standard?

Illustration: In 2011 the Episcopal Church made a similar confession, had National and regional services of repentance, the movie “Traces of the Trade” which revealed their bishop’s participation in the slave trade was viewed in churches and communities across the country, each parish was directed to intentionally “repair the breach” by engaging with African American communities in their parish to explore what repair and reconciliation could look like.

But it was not mandated. There was no quality control to see how well folks were fairing, to see whether or not authentic relationships, reconciliation, repair or transformation was happening. Because for white people, you always have a choice of whether you SEE or not and how much and for how LONG you will SEE.

I believe that God is giving us **another opportunity** to SEE. Because again, our **sinfulness** is a pattern...our **blindness** is a pattern, our **idolatry** is a pattern. We may not be worshipping Baal-aka Ba-ahl, or Asherah Poles or a Golden Calf, but OUR idol God is AMERICA. The so-called American Dream, the American way of life, American exceptionalism and this ILLUSION of American Superiority which is all rooted in the illusion of white supremacy. But we are JUST as BLIND and SINFUL as the generations of Israel and Judah and our own families before us.

Illustration: We have heard some heavy debates on 2nd Amendment rights vs gun control, but the TRUTH is, if you are WHITE in America the 2nd Amendment **does** give you the RIGHT to bear arms... to protect yourself, your family and your property. But is that REALLY the reality for ALL Americans?

MASS SHOOTINGS IN AMERICA BY HEAVILY ARMED WHITE MEN -OUTCOME=ARRESTED ALIVE

The Marshall Report just announced that there were “more mass shootings in the past five years than in any other half-decade going back to 1966.” We JUST had three major shootings in the last month or so. But who were the shooters? And why don’t we say THEIR names? I know we tell ourselves that we don’t want to embolden them or encourage copycats,

but I can tell you and most black people can tell you that whenever there is a report of a shooting or any crime, and they don't say the name or show the picture. We already know! They are White. Can you see!

- Buffalo, New York - 10 black-bodied shoppers DEAD – 3 wounded
- Uvalde, Texas- 21 predominately brown-bodied children DEAD
- And just on Monday on the 4th of July in Highland Park, Illinois- SEVEN white people in an affluent neighborhood DEAD. **Will we SEE now?**

Now each of the shooters were heavily armed with military grade weapons, each of them had an evil intention to murder as many as they could, and each of them were caught with their WEAPONS IN THEIR HAND or on their person. AND YET, EACH of them were ABLE to be apprehended, arrested and taken to jail ALIVE. By the way, ALL of them were WHITE. Can you SEE it?

POLICE SHOOTINGS OF UN-ARMED BLACK MEN/BOYS-OUTCOME=DEAD

Now, just a couple weeks ago in Akron, Ohio a young 25-year-old black man named Jayland Walker was being pursued by police for a "TRAFFIC VIOLATION". Apparently, he panicked! First, he tried to outrun them in his car, then he got out and ran on foot AWAY from police. And eight POLICE ran after him and put **60 bullets in his body**. And all they had to say was that he had a gun, NOT on his person, but in the back seat of the car along with a gold wedding ring. And folks tried to justify it.

So, if we SEE! And we will tell the TRUTH. There is no 2nd Amendment right for black men in America. In fact, some of you who just heard this, and others who heard it earlier are saying to yourself, "Well maybe if he didn't have a gun, they would not have killed him." "Maybe if he didn't drive away, maybe if he didn't run AWAY he would still be alive."

They shot Jayland Walker **60 TIMES?** There is no justification for shooting a man without a weapon even with a weapon running AWAY from you **60 TIMES. Can't you SEE that?**

And YET, we are **NOT** questioning why heavily armed, murderous, white men are NOT killed. So I am thinking, "AGAIN Lord, we are doing this AGAIN?"

My mind went back to July of 2016. When here in Asheville, Jerry "Jai" Williams was shot and killed by Officer Tyler Radford with a military grade weapon, that detached his arm, and whose body was "held as evidence" for so long that when his mother, Najiyah Avery, was finally allowed to see him JUST before his burial, his body had already begun to deteriorate, so she could barely touch her own child without body parts detaching. And ALLEGEDLY he had a gun in the BACK seat.

But on the OTHER side of the equation. Almost every single time a young or old white man attacks and senselessly murders a massive amount of people with AK-47's or bombs or knives or poison or even eats them like Jeffrey Dahmer, and they are seldom even shot at, almost never killed except when they kill themselves. Do YOU see it?

Because America can't SEE that, can't FEEL that...and so the pattern continues and unarmed black bodied people are murdered by police over and over and over and over and over and over again. Black and brown bodied immigrants are brutalized and dehumanized over and over and over again. Black TRANS women and men mutilated and murdered over, and over again. And we don't even notice, because America IS blind-folded, not because we can't see, but because we REFUSE to SEE the truth.

Conclusion: But there is some GOOD news, because the writer ends this pericope reminding Israel and us who are followers of Jesus the Christ, that THIS is doable. It is not too hard, it is not too far away, the word is close to us, in us, in our hearts and our mouths, not just to quote to show how versed we are in scripture, but to FOLLOW to embody the LOVE of GOD.

Beloved *ALL things are possible through Christ Jesus who strengthens us.* And as believers in the body of Christ we have everything we need to SEE the TRUTH. And AGAIN, GOD has given us Another Opportunity to SEE GOD as God really is, and to SEE the Truth about ourselves, our communities, our churches and this NATION. That we might REPENT, turn from

our wicked, BLIND ways, turn back to GOD and LOVE God will all our hearts, with all our souls,
our strength and with all our minds AND our neighbors as ourselves.

In the name of the Father-Son-Holy Ghost. AMEN