

Sermon Draft for September 21, 2025

Text: Amos 8:4–7

Sermon: “Never Forget”

The king of ancient Syracuse, circa 265 BC, had a problem: He had entrusted to a goldsmith a carefully measured weight of the precious metal with the commission to fashion it into a crown. But now rumor suggested that the goldsmith had substituted a lighter, less valuable metal, perhaps silver, for some of the gold and created a crown that looked passable and weighed exactly the same as the gold he had been given, but he had kept some of the gold for himself. So, the king asked the brilliant Archimedes to solve his quandary. While taking his daily dip at the public bath, Archimedes noticed how his body displaced water from the tub. “Eureka!” He had his solution! If the crown really was pure gold, it would not only weigh the same as gold but also have the same volume as gold, displace precisely the same amount of water. Guess what! Archimedes’s principle busted the goldsmith.

History does not record whether this was deemed a capital offense, but those were not merciful times.

Amos prophesied at a time when God's people were being anything but merciful to the poor and needy among them using dishonest scales and fraudulent trading to hype their profits. God didn't need, doesn't need Archimedes's principle to see not only our open sins but even those hidden in the heart. And Amos gives us God's own Word: ***"The Lord has sworn by the pride of Jacob: 'Surely I will never forget any of their deeds'"*** (Amos 8:7).

The Lord had his prophet Amos speak directly to people who trample the needy and the poor in order to secure personal gain:

"Hear this, you who trample on the needy and bring the poor of the land to an end, saying, 'When will the new moon be over, that we may sell grain? And the Sabbath, that we may offer wheat for sale, that we may make the ephah small and the shekel great and deal deceitfully with false balances, that we may buy the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals and sell the

chaff of the wheat?’’ (vs 4–6). These oppressors had made commerce their god; they dealt deceitfully with their fellow man and practiced extortion against the vulnerable in society.

That sounds like the evils hidden away in corporate headquarters or perhaps in the backstreets and alleys of downtown, the shady shops around the corner, and the deals made under the table.

A competitive economy, such as governs the society in which we live, causes us to look for every opportunity to increase our resources. Perhaps like those condemned by the Lord through his prophet, our own words could be used in testimony to your guilt. They ask, “When will the religious celebration be over that we may get back to business?”

Are we as eager to receive the gifts of God as we are with making monetary profit? A few generations ago, we could point to people who did not want businesses to close on Sundays when people were expected to be in church.

Today even those who regularly attend church expect that businesses will be open and at full capacity, so that as soon as the Sunday service is over, they can go out for lunch, or stop at the store, or pick up a shift at work. Just about everyone feels they need to take every opportunity to work and to be open for business, whether it be on Sunday, Ash Wednesday, Good Friday, Christmas, or Easter.

We expect that the market (the supermarket and the stock market) will continue daily, uninterrupted by religious observances. This is what it means to despise preaching and the Word of God, which the catechism has taught us to recognize as a violation of the Third Commandment: ***“Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.”***

We do not want to be so occupied by the church, her missions, or the poor and needy. The desire for personal gain pushes all of these churchly concerns to the side, and in so doing pushes people aside.

“When will the service be over, that we may get back to our business?”

These are the words of those who trample the needy and do away with the poor by seeking worldly gain above all other concerns.

These are our words.

If we are willing to cheat the Lord out of the Sabbath attention that he has commanded, then it will seem a much smaller thing to cheat our fellow man as we pursue wealth. Those condemned by the Lord through his prophet Amos asked when they might get back to their deceitful dealings, to give less and charge more for it. Don't we simply consider it to be good business to acquire goods at as low a cost as possible and then to sell for as much as we can get?

Corporations can package items in smaller quantities, and governments can alter the value of the dollar. In the same way, employees can find all kinds of ways to cut their work output and look for every opportunity for a wage hike. That is just the way our society operates.

These are generally acceptable transgressions of the Seventh Commandment, getting our neighbor's money and goods by any dishonest way.

It is wrong to live and work in this way, even when our employer or our customers can afford to be victims of such deceitful practices. The ones who are hurt the most from this manner of commerce are the needy and the poor. They cannot survive under these practices, and so are trampled by the economy and pushed out to the fringes of a society that accepts these things as the normal cost of doing business. Many communities are happy to see the poor and needy disappear from their streets, not really caring where they go, as long as they are gone.

The word of the Lord through his prophet Amos echoes in our ears. ***“I will never forget”*** (v 7). God will never forget the poor and needy who have been pushed away. He will never forget the sins that were committed against them and against himself.

He will never forget that people choose worldly commerce over the grace and blessing he wishes to pour out upon them. He will never forget to punish fully those who have sinned against him and his most vulnerable people.

By this word of the Lord, people who think they are doing well economically are brought to the sudden realization that things are going badly. Like a bowl of succulent, ripe fruit left too long displayed on the dining table, the beauty of prosperity goes from ripe to rot. As with fruit, so with mankind: The brown spots of exploitation and oppression become visible and the inbred sin is brought to light, fit only to be thrown out as stinking, rotten compost. The end of the time of bounty suddenly proclaims that the time of God's judgment is here. The time is ripe for the judgment of God to show the true value of all things.

This very judgment of the Lord against the exploitation and oppression of the needy and the poor also reveals his compassion and grace for the same. He cares about what happens to them.

That is good news not only for the economically poor and physically needy but also for those who find themselves to be spiritually poor in sin and deeply in need of forgiveness and reconciliation with this God.

While there is no more to be spoken to those who brazenly continue in their self-serving pursuit of commercial gain, the Lord still has a word for those who confess their poverty of spirit. As he exalts the value of the poor as precious in his sight, he holds each of us in our spiritual poverty to be of more value than any earthly treasure. He gave all he had in order to have us as his own, reconciled to him, forgiven of all our sin. He gave his Son into this life of economic oppression, to die stripped and humiliated on the cross, buried in a borrowed tomb, having given himself as the price to ransom the needy and the poor, those who know they cannot pay the price for themselves.

The justice of this God, which necessitates that he condemn those who oppress the needy and the poor, is also the justice that pays the full price for those sinners to be reconciled and saved. The holy, precious, priceless life of his eternal and divine Son is what it cost to redeem us.

The time is ripe for the judgment of God to show the true value of all things. The last word to is not a word of condemnation, followed by a heavy and foreboding silence, but a word of forgiveness and grace, of life and blessing, of reconciliation and peace. A word that proclaims us valued by God. His word to us is that we will never be forgotten. We will never be cast off, pushed aside, or put to an end like our society would do to the needy and the poor.

God's word of forgiveness to us he will not forget. It will stand forever as one of his divine judgments. He cannot forget his Son, and so he cannot forget those whom he has bought at the price of his Son, those whom he has covered with the righteousness of his Son.

The time is ripe to confess our sins to this gracious God and to hear how precious we are to him. He has paid dearly to set us free.

Amen.