

## Sermon: 2019/07/21 (6th Sunday after Pentecost, Year C) - Amos 8:1-12; Psalm 52; Colossians 1:15-28 & Luke 10:38-42\_BTR

This has been a week of unusually important anniversaries:

*Five* years ago, on Wednesday, Malaysia Airlines Flight 17, carrying mostly Dutch and Australian tourists - among others, was shot out of the sky by a Russian made and supplied surface-to-air missile launched from somewhere in the shadowy forests of eastern Ukraine.<sup>[n.1]</sup>

And it remains the deadliest incident involving a commercial plane in history.

*Fifty* years ago yesterday, of course, in 1969, the astronaut Neil Armstrong and his co-pilot Edwin "Buzz" Aldrin landed the *Eagle* - a spacecraft - on the surface of the moon to much acclaim and celebration: "[a] giant leap for mankind."

Now, why do I mention these things?

Well, the Apollo 11 mission - an unarguably *astounding* feat of ingenuity, perseverance and courage, *inspirational* to generations - cost the American taxpayer 145 *billion* in inflation-adjusted dollars.

That is an almost *unimaginably* large amount of money.

A sum sooo huge that, if you piled it onto the floor, it would become a veritable mountain of gold coins like that in which Scrooge McDuck swims during the intro for Disney's *The Ducktales* series.

(Remember that?)

And that staggering "slice" of US treasure was spent in the very year that the "Office of the Budget" - an agency that reported directly to President Kennedy - determined that 12.1% of the population had - and I quote - less than 'the minimum necessary to respectably support [their] families.'<sup>[n.2]</sup>  
12.1 per cent.

That's significantly more than 1 in ten.

More than 1 in ten living in squalor.

Surviving only by hand-to-mouth.

In the urban slums.

The "hill folks."

The person addicted to their expensive pain-medication.

The unemployable "vet" with PTSD "spat" out from almost twenty hard years of war in Afghanistan.

That staggering "slice" of US treasure was spent in the same year that the author

Michael Harrington made his own "splashdown" - not by parachute in the Pacific - not literally - but in a *literary* way among the so-called "chattering classes," with the second edition of his "best-selling" book, *The Other America*:

Shocked at how many were being left behind in the world's largest and fastest growing economy, he wrote about a nightmare - a "nightmare" of poverty that wasn't just a "condition;" it had become a 'culture': one that produces, he observed, a people who 'tend to be hopeless and passive, ...rigid and hostile.' He wrote that '[t]o be poor is not simply to be deprived of the material things of this world. It is [now] to enter a fatal, futile universe, an America within America [- an America] with a twisted spirit.'<sup>[n.3]</sup>

And, reflecting on this situation, some have concluded, with reason and justification, that perhaps our priorities weren't rightly ordered.

And maybe still aren't?

As a country.

As a nation.

As a society or "civilization."

In fact, according to Pew Research, a survey taken in 1970 - less than a year later - showed that a majority of respondents - 56% to be exact - thought the effort hadn't been worth the money spent.<sup>[n.4]</sup>

And one historian of the project - Gerard DeGroot - described it as "obscene."<sup>[n.5]</sup>

Now, in the interests of transparency, I should tell you that he said this in a British newspaper - *The Daily Telegraph* - for a British readership.

And I'm British. (Obviously.)

And I know what you're thinking...

You're thinking we're "killjoys."

*Jealous "killjoys."*

And it is true that Her Royal Majesty's space-program is laughable.

Amateurish.

Only once - *once(!)* - has a British-made rocket put a British-made satellite into orbit.<sup>[n.6]</sup>

We usually come to Florida for that too.

But maybe - *maybe* - DeGroot is right.

Objectively.

Maybe the "space race" was '...lunacy when terrestrial frontiers such as disease, starvation and drought cry out for cash.'<sup>[n.7]</sup>

What is Heaven's perspective, I wonder?

Not just about the priorities of the administration back then, but now?

And about my *personal* priorities?  
As to how I'm using *my* time and wealth.

Consider today's reading from Amos:

Israel was in "free-fall."

A "car-crash."

The most important country in the world - God's chosen people - and it became an unmitigated disaster.

'[A] basket of summer fruit' sitting out, unattended, in the sun.

That's the prophet's metaphor.

Picture it:

The ripe fruit rotting;

The apples brown.

Ants and wasps and flies swarming over it.

That's what had become of the "Promised Land" that Joshua had fought so hard to conquer, and David and Solomon fought so hard to enlarge and fortify.

And God let it happen.

He had withdrawn His "hand" of protection because, we see, for, *principally*, one reason: "'The end has come...'" because? Because "'...you...trample on the needy, ...'" (that's verse 4.)

The 'ephah' was the Israelites' unit of measurement for wheat and cereals, and what had happened, Amos observes, is that merchants had begun to routinely cheat their customers by shrinking the ephah's size *whilst* charging the same. (That ever happen to you?)

And to get even "more bang for their buck" they were mixing into the bushels inedible detritus from the threshing floor.

It was disgraceful *and yet commonplace*.

"The norm."

Everyday business.

C'est la vie.

And Amos is sent to say, effectively, "Yeah, it might be. 'Oh, that's just business.' But God sees you, and He expects better. Your priorities aren't straight. They're crooked." (I'm referencing the plumbline passage from last week.)

And we're all in some business of some kind, right?

You might say - if you were in an irreverent, mischievous mood - that mine is "selling" biblical exposition or something.

Or that I'm a purveyor of very small sips of wine.

A wafer distributor.

*Yours* might be selling homes,

or better health,  
or another language,  
or insurance.  
Or something else entirely,  
and what Amos has to say is still true and applies to us.  
Does the way in which we sell what we sell reflect what we believe to be true  
about Jesus and the gift of eternal life He offers through the Cross?  
Martha got her priorities backwards:  
She put washing the dishes before listening faithfully to Christ.  
What about you and me?  
Do we often “slip” into making a similar mistake when we’re at our various  
businesses?

Let’s take a moment to reflect.

Footnotes:

1. See: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Malaysia\\_Airlines\\_Flight\\_17](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Malaysia_Airlines_Flight_17)
2. Babones, Salvatore (11th of June, 2013), ‘Absolute Poverty in America Higher than in 1969’, available at <https://inequality.org/research/absolute-poverty-america/>, (accessed July 20, 2019).
3. (1962, 1969, 1981, 1993, 1997), New York, N. Y.: Touchstone, 122.
4. Various (23rd of April, 2014), ‘’, available at <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/04/23/americans-keen-on-space-exploration-less-so-on-paying-for-it/>, (accessed July 20, 2019).
5. DeGroot, Jerry (25th of February, 2009), ‘The Space Race is a Pointless Waste of Money’, *The Daily Telegraph*, available at <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/personal-view/4807506/The-space-race-is-a-pointless-waste-of-money.html>, (accessed July 20, 2019).
6. See: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prospero\\_\(satellite\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prospero_(satellite))
7. See n.5, above.