

## COMMENTS/QUESTIONS ON THE LESSONS FOR OCTOBER 13, 2024

### Amos 5:6-7, 10-15

- As a reminder: Amos is a prophet from the southern kingdom of Judah, but he is prophesying in the northern kingdom of Israel, shortly before Israel is conquered by Assyria. Though Israel is perceived as being punished for their idolatry, Amos speaks of their injustice and their oppression of the poor. The people's indifference to the poor is shown in the luxury they live in, while neglecting "the needy in the gate." How would we as a community or as a nation measure up? How might we "establish justice in the gate"?
- The word "wormwood" (v. 7) appears eight times in the Old Testament. Wormwood is a bitter herb and is used as a metaphor for bitterness. To "turn justice to wormwood" means that justice is being perverted, "embittered." The people long for justice but instead taste bitterness. "Wormwood" is used only once in the New Testament in Revelation 8:10-11: "The third angel blew his trumpet, and a great star fell from heaven, blazing like a torch, and it fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water. The name of the star is Wormwood. A third of the waters became wormwood, and many died from the water, because it was made bitter." Bitterness becomes personified as a consequence and a judgment. End-times enthusiasts became enamored with this verse after 1986 when the nuclear accident happened in Chernobyl, because the name Chernobyl means ... wormwood. In both Amos and Revelation, we are challenged about when we have perverted justice, when we have turned the righteousness God desires and made it into bitterness.

### Psalms 90:12-17

- This psalm is ascribed to Moses, the only one in the Psalms. It is a psalm that speaks of our mortality, of how short our life is. In the conclusion to the psalm, we hear the psalmist encourage us to use our time wisely. How might we encourage one another to do the same with our lives?

### Hebrews 4:12-16

- In the first part of this passage (4:12-13), Hebrews vividly speaks about the power of the word of God, referring both to Scripture (as he knew it: Old Testament) and a prophetic word. The word is meant to cut deep, laying us bare before God and others. The word is meant to be a surgical tool for ourselves, NOT a weapon against others. The word of God is meant to lay us bare, NOT for us to lay others bare.
- In the second part (4:14-16) Hebrews transitions to speaking about Jesus as "a great high priest." Hebrews emphasizes that Jesus as a high priest – as one who intercedes for us before God – is not one who is unlike us. Rather, Jesus as a high priest knows the struggles of our lives because he has identified with our lives. In asking for mercy and help, this identity of Jesus with our weaknesses is meant to embolden us before God.

### Mark 10:17-31

- We can be so quick to explain away these verses, but what does Jesus mean when he says, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the Kingdom of God" – especially after he tells the rich man to go, sell all that he had, and give to the poor and follow Jesus? What is our relationship to our wealth? How does God call us to be in our relationship to wealth?
- Note how un-reassuring the reassurance of Jesus is. After Peter proclaims how they have given up everything, Jesus tells them that they will receive back a hundredfold in this age ... with persecutions. The weakness and suffering that we receive from our journey of faith is seen as a gift and a reward!

- Though we are challenged to find grace in this passage, two words used may indicate that this is not the end of the story. Unlike this scene in Matthew and Luke, Mark tells us that Jesus looked at this young man and loved him – the only time that Jesus expresses love to another in this gospel. Jesus sees the potential and possibility within the man. Then we are told that the man went away grieving, which we usually understand as “giving up.” But grieving here may be the first step for this man to take steps toward making a commitment, as Paul will speak of in 2 Corinthians: “Now I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because your grief led to repentance; for you felt a godly grief, so that you were not harmed in any way by us. <sup>10</sup>For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation and brings no regret, but worldly grief produces death.” (2 Corinthians 7:9-10)