

Reflection for July 14, 2024 - I'm Not Small

Inspired by Amos 7:7-15

Those who would like to control people and the world around them believe themselves to be “big shots.” They understand themselves to be leadership material. They enjoy “strutting about” and bathe in the glory of being influential.

They like folks about them jumping to attention in their presence. “I am important, and I know it,” the ego says to the self. “I enjoy being in the limelight,” is the message the brain receives. And the ego keeps driving home the vision that “I am powerful, important and influential. And there is an affirmation that “I like it.”

Leadership that is centered on ego and personal gain is where we find the absence of decency, respect for human life and the environment. In fact, it's not uncommon for those who have manipulated themselves into leadership positions, to believe they have somehow been preordained by God to rule. Others visualize mistakenly that they are akin to Gods themselves. These days, I might suggest individuals like Trump, Putin, Netanyahu, and Kim Jong Un see themselves in this light. (But this is not a political sermon).

In Biblical times we know that numerous leaders ruled ruthlessly with little regard for human life. Their ego was big too. The Pharaoh of Egypt, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, Herod the Great, King Ahab and the Emperor Nero to name just a few. Moses, Jesus and other prophetic voices would speak out in opposition to these “Big Men.”

We know from historical accounts that powerful leaders did not listen well.

Today we heard about the prophet Amos, another voice for reason in the time of the great Kings of Israel. God has seen enough of lawlessness and idolatry; enough of treachery and wickedness among God's people. God uses the image of a common builder's plumb line, showing Amos that behavioral covenants have deviated from what is expected. They are out of alignment with God's vision and disaster is forecast for King Jeroboam and his kingdom too.

Amos brings this message to the temple priest Amaziah who ignores Amos' warning. “Go take a hike Amos. You are not needed or wanted here. You think you are such a big shot? Go and peddle your predictions elsewhere. Get lost.” **“This is the King's sanctuary and a temple of the kingdom.”**

“Well you have it all wrong,” replies Amos. I'm really a simple “small man.” I earn my living through sheep ranching and pruning trees. I'm not the prophet you think I am. I'm simply here to give you a message I heard from God. God told me the kingdom was out of alignment, God's moral values are not being upheld. And so, God instructed me to tell you that the King can expect dire consequences if he doesn't get the people to change their ways.”

Amos never thought of himself as someone important. In fact, he wasn't a trained prophet. He was a commoner, an ordinary "little man" that God choose to be a messenger. He didn't go about Israel offering words of wisdom for his own glorification. It was never about personal ego. It would always be about God's message and living in right relationship.

So, the roles are reversed. Amos becomes **BIG** while Amaziah and King Jeroboam become quite small. At least in God's kin-dom they do.

How often do we look upon ourselves as small, insignificant, incapable and unworthy? We are too small, unimportant, and irrelevant. We can't stand up to the Big Shots, can we?

Perhaps we need to visualize the "size" perspective a little differently. Because I think we subscribe to a misconception.

I used to sing that song by Sharon, Lois and Bram to the girls when they were young. They particularly enjoyed my imagining carrying an ice cream truck on my back as I stooped over and walked around. Imagining was and is so much fun. Imagining with children is a lot more than fun though, it is an excellent motivational exercise. Why not believe you are BIG AND TALL! Why not believe you can really make a difference?

I've talked before about how small I sometimes feel when it comes to making a difference. I like to think that in this muddy, complex and cruel world what I do is impactful, in at least some positive way. Do you hope for the same thing?

Friday my youngest granddaughter Athena video called me from Princeton. Her mother was at work, and I think she was a little bored. I asked her if she was hot, and she said yes. "Well why don't you go outside to your pool," I asked. "It has bugs in it she replied." She then took the phone out with her and showed me. "Papa, do you know that earwigs can swim," she said. Well, I did not know that. I do know that our chats encourage her and hopefully influence her in a good way. She has learned to call either Lenore or I when she needs some reassurance too, like the time she said her mom was being mean to her. She was hoping we could step in in a small way and be Big in her defense.

And of course, taking your granddaughter to the beach and on the way home getting her a "small" ice cream cone is another way to be Big in the world.

My prophecy is that we should forget about being small, an insignificant cog in a gigantic wheel. That's not how God sees a new kin-dom developing. Leave the ego driven "would-be" power seekers to their own devices. Let them bathe in their own limelight. They will eventually burn themselves out.

Those of us with our feet planted firmly on the earth and our ego left hanging on a hook in the closet are those that really can make a BIG difference.

Those are the grammas who listen to the weeping of their granddaughter's break up with their first and expected to be "forever" boyfriend, providing some helpful comfort.

Those are the mums and dads that pick up the pieces when their child doesn't make the cut for the school play or the local baseball team. It is the schoolteacher who stays just a little longer helping a student with a math problem or the neighbour who comes over and takes the snow off your sidewalk or cuts your grass when you are unable to. Those are "Big" things done by ordinary everyday little folk like you and me.

I'm going to back up to the catchy children's song I played just a few minutes ago and repeat the last verse for you. The words are, ***"I'm not small, I'm so tall, I can carry everyone on my back, when they sing, I'll sing too. That's not very hard to do. I'm not small, I'm so tall, I can carry everybody on my back."***

That catchy children's song popularized by Sharon, Lois and Bram back in the 70's was likely never meant to be prophetic, let alone be played during a worship service (except perhaps at children's time). I never sang it to the kids with that in mind. But it is inspirational.

What better image for a ministry like ours. We love one another and treat each other with kindness and respect. We do for our neighbours what they can't easily do for themselves. We hold each other up and they in turn hold us when our need for compassion is high. We **"hold one another on our backs."** We are **small** but we stand **Big and Tall** in a community and a world that needs us.

We are simple farmers and ranchers like Amos. We are teachers, plumbers, business folks, health professionals, peacekeepers, first responders, lawyers, worship leaders and clerks. We are regular folks. Most of us are retired. We are small but we stand tall. We follow the Amos' of our time advocating for God's new kin-dom. We are good listeners, advocates, and friends.

We're not small, we are Big and Tall.

Thanks for listening this morning. Amen