Topic: The Plumb Line (Season of Pentecost 5, Lectionary C)
Scripture: Psalm 25:1-10, Amos 7:7-9, Luke 10:25-37
Hymns: BB292 God of Grace and God of Glory, BB501 Jesus, Joy of Loving Hearts, VU375 Spirit, Spirit of Gentleness

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Let’s take a moment to pray…

Lord, before this world's days even began, your Word was in the beginning, and it was with you and it was you. The mystery of that brings us to our knees. Yet today you allow us to open your Word and know you better. So, we ask that you would give us eyes to see and ears to hear. Give us hearts open to your Spirit as we seek you. AMEN.

(SLIDE) Prolific authour C.S. Lewis wrote the following, "The moment you say that one morality can be better than another, you are, in fact, measuring them both by a standard saying one conforms to that standard more than the other."

None of you here today, or watching online, are immune to the news cycle. We look at the headlines and we see Trump is signing executive orders again. We say "That horrible man, how evil". We watch the nightly news and see Russia has attacked Ukraine under the cover of darkness. We say "How terrible for them, how can we help".

But where does this come from, these ideas about what is good and what is bad? Surely we did not come up with this morality out of thin air? Why is it we call good, good... and bad, bad? How do we know murder is wrong, and charity is good? How do we know that theft is wrong, but love is good?

Lewis, the authour I mentioned just before, posited there are really only two views to morality. Dualism, and the Christian morality. (SLIDE) Dualism, he writes, is the idea that Good and Bad are two separate, equal and independent entities: one benevolent, the other malevolent, but each of them thinks they are the good because they are independent of any morality (think of the devil and the angel on the shoulder from cartoons).

But (PAUSE) there's a problem with Dualism: bad things cannot simply exist as bad. In order for something to be bad, there has to be an opposite to measure it by. Bad is the opposite to good, but it cannot be opposite if there is no good. Good naturally exists, we know good even as humans. We know love is good. We know mercy is good.

Thus, we know hate is bad and we know brutality is bad. So, Dualism cannot be... because there is something above good that establishes good. Amos, (SLIDE) a simple man - a shepherd and farmer - runs into that something.

God shows him three visions, the first two are of judgment. Locusts devouring fields, fire burning up land... and to each Amos cried out "Jacob cannot survive this!" and so God relents. The third vision, we heard today, is the plumb line - a carpenter's tool used to measure straightness.

God shows this to Amos and tells him, (SLIDE) "**Behold, I am setting a plumb line in the midst of my people Israel; I will never again pass by them**". This is what tells us what good is, this is WHO tells us what good is. This is the problem for Dualism, and why it is a false doctrine...

God defines what good is, and by defining what is good we can also define what is bad. God measures His people against His own standards. Not our standards. Not the culture's standards. Not tradition's standards. HIS standards.

Israel had, by this time in Amos, become prosperous and decadent... which led them to something terrible... it led them be unjust and idolatrous. They trampled the poor, they corrupted worship, and they silenced prophets. Sound familiar? (SLIDE PAUSE)

Hold onto to that for a moment while we look at the lawyer from Luke 10. "**Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?**" This lawyer asks the Blessed Christ and, Lord have mercy, if he isn't looking for this (SLIDE & POINT UP) exact thing. The lawyer is looking for the plumb line.

(EM) What are the requirements for me, he's asking the Lord Jesus. And Jesus answers his question with a question, "**What is written in the law? How do you read it?**" and (EM UP) Praise the Lord the lawyer is up on his First Testament. He answers with the Shema, (SLIDE) from Deuteronomy - say it with me!

"**Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and Love your neighbour as yourself**".

Great, says Jesus... go out and do that. But before Jesus could move on the lawyer sticks a wrench in the plans, "**And who is my neighbour?**" (EM frustrated - They just don't get it! God can't make this any more simple!) So Jesus decides to hit them up with the parable of the Good Samaritan.

We know the story (PAUSE), a man is beaten and left for dead on the side of the road. (EM) And all the good, supposedly moral people - a priest, a levite, good religious people, all pass by. But it was those darn, no-good Samaritans that did the GOOD thing. For us, today, we look at this parable and get the warm-fuzzies. Right? We're all good Samaritans, here!

But the original audience was scandalized by this parable. (EM) The Samaritan was the wrong hero for this story! It should have been the Levite, they know about destitution. It should have been the priest, they know about charity! Yet it's the Samaritan who has compassion.

He didn't ask himself about the race, politics, gender, class, or convenience of the situation. He saw a need, and he acted. This is the plumb line in practice... loving your neighbour with costly mercy.

But there's definitely tension in this. (PAUSE) Amos warns of judgment against the plumb line. If you're not straight aligned with it, you fall into the locsusts' devouring maw, or the fire's consuming wrath. Luke, however, reveals mercy. The Gospel holds both. God's justice is perfect.

He does not tolerate sin - we know this from Revelation. Sin is thrown into the lake of fire never to be entertained ever again. God's mercy is also perfect - we know this from the Gospel's account of the crucifixion. Mercy is poured out in Christ, who took the judgment we deserve.

Jesus is the One who fulfills both stories: he is the one true Israelite who measures up to the plumb line; he is the ultimate good Samaritan who comes to the aid of all who call on Him. (SLIDE of "Live Measured by Christ, Move with Compassion) So, what do we do with this?

You know now that there is definitive proof of good in the world, God tells us exactly what it is. He set the plumb line, and by that line we can also define what is evil, what is bad. It's not a matter of our feelings, it's not a matter of what the culture says.

CNN and Fox and Facebook and the Spectator can call something good or bad all day long, but if that contradicts what God says is good and bad, then throw them away! We should examine ourselves, measure ourselves by Christ - the plumb line of God's Word.

So if you know what is good and what is bad, let's take the first step to repent of what we've done bad. The plumb line exposes sin, BUT it also points us to the cross. Jesus passed the test for us, and so His righteousness is our only hope.

Lastly, move with compassion towards living this out. Don't pass by chances to act with compassion, show it... mercy isn't convenient, BUT it is Christlike. (EM) Pray for the Holy Spirit to make you sensitive to the needs around you - especially the ones you always pass by.

This doesn't always mean throwing more money at charity, this doesn't always mean tithing more, this doesn't always mean giving away your stuff... (EM UP) love is SO MUCH MORE than stuff and money and things.

(EM STRONG) Love is holding people in prayer. Love is being silent when we'd rather be enraged. Love is extending the hand of peace in tense moments. Love is patient, love is kind, it does not envy, it does not boast. Love is not being proud.

Love means not being selfish when we'd rather have it all. Love means letting go of grudges and revenge! Love means truth and honesty above saving our own skins. Love means protection, and trusting, and always perservering with hope!!

AMEN.