



*Let us pray:* O God, you made us in your own image and redeemed us through Jesus your Son: look with compassion on the whole human family; take away the arrogance and hatred which infect our hearts; break down the walls that separate us; unite us in bonds of love; and work through our struggle and confusion to accomplish your purposes on earth; that, in your good time, all nations and races may serve you in harmony around your heavenly throne; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

Mindfulness. Intentionality. How. These approaches to the way in which we live our lives and the reasoning behind our decisions are more important than ever as we live in a world that is increasing in violence – or at least our awareness of violence – than has been true in the past.

How does the violence we see every day influence our lives? Does it tend to lessen our belief that we can make a positive difference in the world? Does it influence a life that builds barriers rather than being more open because we have become more hardened to the needs all around us? What can we do that will really make a difference?

The short answer is that we may not know how the life we lead influences others. We may not know if our choice to remain engaged with the world around us really does turn someone away from a life that is lived with suspicion of the other or an attitude that everyone is out to get me so I had better act first.

The prophet Amos was tasked with warning Israel that the way they were living – the values that they held to – were far from those that God had set before them as the people chosen by God to be a light to the world<sup>1</sup>. If one looks, there may be several similarities between the time in which Amos lived – about 788-747BCE – and our time in terms of social issues and challenges.

In this time Israel was at the pinnacle of its worldly power in terms of the territory it covered and in terms of economic prosperity. And, it was a society which had definite haves and have-nots. What we call “economic inequality” today.

In Israel and in Jewish tradition, the land was the basis of wealth and it was the primary factor for a family. There were definite laws around when land could be sold out of the family and provisions for redemption. In fact, the word and concept of redemption originally had to do with enabling a family who had lost land to reclaim it. By the time of the prophet Amos, though, this system that was designed to provide some level of economic stability for all people had gone seriously awry. Definite haves and have-nots. Civil unrest. Corruption in governance. Violence among the population.

Amos was called by God to remind them that they were the people chosen by God to bring light to the world. They were to live a life and to create a society that exemplified what is possible when you follow the *Shema*: Love God with all your heart, mind, soul and body – from Deuteronomy chapter 6 - and when you love neighbor as yourself – from Leviticus chapter 19.

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<sup>1</sup> New Oxford Annotated Bible, introduction to Amos (Oxford, 2001), 1302-1303.

These passages were ones well known to observant Jews. They are well known to us as Jesus sets these before us as well.

Unfortunately, then as now, we too often forget the linchpin of a civil society. To love God and to love neighbor. We, too often, forget that how we behave does influence how others respond to us and then us to them and the vicious cycle of violence and extreme continues.

So what are we to do? If what we do and how we do it makes no difference, then there is no point in coming to church, in participating in outreach, in loving your family, or in being a “good” employee.

Mindfulness. Intentionality. How. These approaches to our life, individually and as a member of society, can make a difference. We may not see the difference but we can be comforted that God does see and that God can use our efforts to help reshape the world into a place that will, someday, reflect God’s incredible love for us.

The famous or perhaps infamous story in Luke about Mary and Martha has most often been seen as promoting learning – sitting at the feet of Jesus – above hospitality. It has been seen as women keep your place in the kitchen and don’t bother Jesus with your whining about your problems with your sibling. Perhaps, though, both learning and hospitality are values we should embrace. Both are important in Jewish tradition. Even Paul reminds us in The Letter to the Hebrews:

Let love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it. (Hebrews 13:1-2).

Hospitality is a core value in creating good relationships among people. Breaking of bread is core to our identity as Christians. Learning, also, can be a core value in creating a society which seeks to understand the other and to find ways to promote the well-being of all. So both Martha and Mary are examples of core values that can help create a society which promotes the well-being of all.

Perhaps part of what Martha is frustrated about and what Jesus is responding to is reflected in our readings from a couple of weeks ago. Remember that Jesus sent out the 70 in pairs to heal and preach and teach. No one went alone. Ministry is not an individual activity. It is something best done at least in pairs. Yes, there is a place and a need for individual prayer and reflection. And yet, the best ministry is one that we do together. It may be only two of us but at least with two we can help each other through the rough spots. We can bounce ideas and reflections off of each other. We can hold each other accountable. Ministry done alone runs the risk of going astray.

Mindfulness. Intentionality. How. Dov Seidman<sup>2</sup> reminds us that there are both situational values and sustainable values. Situational values are those that are particular to the situation facing you. An example might be negotiating a contract. I have certain goals for the contract and if I’m willing to bend or to create my usual actions or values in order to secure that contract the way I want it, that is an example of situational ethics or situations values. I will do whatever I need to in order to secure the contract- whether or not my actions are consistent with what I state to be

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<sup>2</sup> Dov Seidman. How: why How we do anything means everything.(Wiley, 2011)

my core values. Sustainable values, on the other hand, are those that help us create the kind of society and environment in which we want to live. Sustainable values should be the values we operate with regardless of the situation. Seidman contends that we have moved into a more situational values society and we need to create and promote a sustainable values world if we ever hope to end violence and injustice.

Seidman argues that we have entered an Era of Behavior. We have left the Agrarian, Industrial and Information Eras behind us. What matters now is how we do what we need to do. According to Seidman, how we do anything means everything. How should we behave; how should we treat our neighbor. Not how can we gain the most advantage for ourselves at the expense of our neighbor's well-being. Do the right thing for the right reasons. Discern and follow sustainable values so that they lie behind all of our decisions and our actions and are such a part of who we are that we do not have to stop and think each time we face a dilemma.

For Christians our sustainable values are love of God and love of neighbor. And, following the quip of Rabbi Hillel: All the rest is commentary. Learn at the feet of Jesus as Mary did. Be hospitable to all who cross your path, as Martha did. Work together, be accountable to each other so that you can be a disciple of Jesus, spreading the good news that God has come near. God loves you and God calls you to be a light to the world.

Remember the psalmist who decries the tyrant who boasts of wickedness, who plots ruin with a tongue like a sharpened razor and who is a worker of deception. Be the one the psalmist praises who is like a green olive tree in the house of God, trusting in the mercy of God for ever and ever and in giving thanks for what God has done. Be the one who lives intentionally and mindfully with a heart set on God. Those are sustainable values that will help reshape our world into one that reflects the love God has for us. *Amen.*