

Leftovers. Does anyone really enjoy eating leftovers? Not me! And I don't think I'm the only one! Now, we all know the wonderful feast day of Thanksgiving is coming. I love the Thanksgiving worship services here at First Lutheran, by the way, I think they are especially meaningful in our farming community, a wonderful way to give thanks to God for the harvest! And I, of course, love the Thanksgiving Day Feast itself! In fact, I am usually blessed to eat two big meals that day, when we visit both *my* family in the cities and then *Amy's* family in Wisconsin, but the leftover turkey that shows up in sandwiches, soups, soufflés and who knows what else for the next week and a half, I can definitely do without!

By the way, speaking of leftovers . Is the refrigerator at your house anything like the fridge at ours where it becomes kind of a contest to see how long you can keep from throwing those everyday leftovers away before hopefully (!) someone else in the house breaks down and takes care of it, either by eating them or throwing them away? Who likes leftovers? **Not** me! (Pause)

And neither do the judges in Israel living during the time of Amos the prophet. Did you notice that phrase in the last verse of our text? “The *remnant* of Joseph.” That's the phrase the prophet Amos uses to describe the faithful people who are left in Israel: “The remnant of Joseph.” These are the faithful few. They're the leftovers! The only ones remaining in Israel who hadn't given up on their faith in God, and yet they were still being oppressed, abused and mistreated by the Judges who were supposed to be protecting the people.

As it says in verses 11 and 12 of our text, one of the ways these judges were “trampling on the poor” was by taxing the farmers' grain when they brought in the harvest. Here's how Amos puts it: “Therefore because you trample on the poor and you exact taxes of grain from him, you have built houses of hewn stone, but you shall not dwell in them, you have planted pleasant vineyards, but you shall not drink their wine. **For I know how many are your transgressions** and how great are your sins— you who afflict the righteous, who take a bribe, and turn aside the needy in the gate.”

So, by being forced to pay taxes on what they *themselves* had harvested, the poor and needy were being made to finance the lifestyles of these judges with their expensive homes and valuable vineyards. In other words, Israel's “well-to-do's” were getting richer, while at the same time Israel's “have-nots” were becoming poorer. The gist of the passage is this: “You impose a burden on the poor, and you take from him even the measure of grain to which he is

entitled.” This is how these judges in Israel were treating the “leftovers” or the “remnant of Joseph”.

But why does Amos call the down-and-outs “**Joseph’s** leftovers”? Why **Joseph**? Well here, I think that the children who have been in Sunday school over the past few weeks will be able to help us out! If they’ve been paying close attention in class, and I’m sure they have, 😊 they could tell us a thing or two about the man from the Bible named Joseph.

Joseph, as I also shared with the 8th grade catechism students in our own lesson last Wednesday, was a man whose life was filled with many ups and downs. Although things end up very well for him, the Bible shows us that throughout much of his life Joseph was a man familiar with suffering and familiar with being **cast aside**, or being treated as an unwanted left-over, whether it was by being thrown in a pit by his jealous older brothers, sold into slavery in Egypt, or put in prison for a crime he did not commit, Joseph was a man whom Amos’ listeners knew was someone used to be cast aside and discarded as an unwanted leftover. For them Joseph was a recognizable symbol of the oppressed people living during **their** day.

How this text **starts** to hit home for us today is this: All too often we treat people as leftovers that we quickly discard and throw away. Now, most likely, we don’t directly take advantage of people like the judges at the time of Amos were doing, but let’s ask ourselves, “Do I look down on others whom I think don’t measure up to my standards?”, like the poor, for instance. Instead of helping someone who is in need, do we think, “They should learn to live their lives better, make better choices, and then they wouldn’t be poor,” and so rationalize a reason why we can ignore Jesus’ command in Luke 12:33 to “give to the needy”

Have we followed the commandments of God perfectly, particularly in how we treat other people, as the rich young man in our Gospel lesson today claimed to have done perfectly all his life? If we’re honest we know that we have not. We have said, thought, and done unkind things toward others. In fact, if we are honest we have to confess that we too are sinful and are no more deserving of God’s forgiving love than the corrupt judges in the days of Amos. We deserve to have God say to us as He did to them: “**For I know how many are your transgressions**” (v.12). In fact, because of our transgressions we should be rejected, we should be cast off from God forever. Our sins make **us** like “leftovers,”

But... God **loves** leftovers! That means God loves you! “God sent His only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that

we have loved God but that he loved us and sent His Son to be the (cleansing sacrifice) for our sins.” That’s how St. John puts it in 1 John 4:9 & 10.

Here is the second and even more important way this Old Testament text applies to us today: It’s when it says “Seek the LORD and live”! Thankfully it’s really the LORD who seeks after us and He doesn’t ever give up looking for us. He keeps looking and looking and waiting and waiting. He knows that we can’t find Him by ourselves so He comes looking for us. He found us and made each of us a precious child of His in Holy Baptism. And He never loses patience with us when we stumble and sin and when we wander away from Him by not obeying His commandments. The LORD keeps looking and looking and waiting and waiting. He is always inviting us to return to Him, to seek Him and live, to receive His love and forgiveness that Jesus has earned for us and freely gives to us through His Word, the Bible, and Means of Grace: Holy Absolution, Holy Baptism, Holy Communion and whenever we hear His Good News proclaimed to us. Hear it again right now, “Your sins are forgiven you for Jesus sake.”

We’ve heard today about how the judges during the days of Amos **despised** and **rejected** the people they were supposed to protect. Well, Jesus **also** was despised and rejected by men (Is 53:3). He was mocked by the crowd, betrayed by Judas, denied by Peter, forsaken by His friends, sentenced to death by a weak-willed Roman governor, crowned with thorns by those who spat upon him, and scourged by muscle-men just short of death. But “the stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone” (Ps 118:22). God **loves** leftovers. God loves His Son & God loves you!

And now, motivated by God’s love for us in Christ, we care for those among us who are the least, the lost, and the last. While so many dismiss these kinds of people, we will feed them, clothe them, and bring them the saving Good News of Christ’s love for them. We **love** leftovers! Amen!