

**“VACATION FOR THE SOUL”**  
**“Into the Fire: Finding God’s presence in Tense Times”**

We have begun a new sermon series, “Vacation for the Soul.” As a child, I always looked forward to summer vacations. I still feel that sense of relaxation when summer hits. I spend long evenings on the deck, ride my bike for both exercise and enjoyment, find more moments to be with family and friends. I believe we need vacations, we need time when the pace slows down and we can savor life a bit more. This week I am back from a week’s vacation. It was good for my soul to reconnect with my son and to have an anniversary weekend with my husband. This week’s spiritual practice is “study” and in some ways doesn’t exactly match our scriptures this week. We have been following the Revised Common Lectionary during this sermon series. I find it a good practice occasionally to be challenged by preaching the lectionary rather than cherry picking the scriptures. What happens, however, is sometimes I am confronted with scriptures that are more difficult. This week is no exception. We have Amos’ strong words of condemnation and John Baptist’s arrest and eventual execution. Prophets are not popular. They bring a searing word of truth to power and usually power does not respond well. Studying the prophets is a helpful reminder that when faithful people become complacent, we need the prophets’ voices to remind us of what God requires and expects. This week is also Vacation Bible School and its theme is around Daniel and Babylon. Please pray for the children and the volunteers this week. Perhaps study IS a good practice to focus on this week. May our study bring us closer to God and put a fire in our hearts and spirits to be the body of Christ in the world.

Things I’d like to remember from today’s sermon: **“Into the Fire: Finding God’s presence in Tense Times”**

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**Prayer for the Week**

*In your compassion, gracious God, You hear the cry of the poor, the needy, and the lonely ones. May we also hear the cries of our brothers and sisters, responding in love as you have shown us in your Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.* Psalm Prayer based on Psalm 34, in Upper Room Worship Book, #260

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## Study Guide

### Monday, July 16, 2018 Amos 7: 7-14

Amos is not an easy book to read. As you can see from our reading today, Amos was not a prophet by birth or by trade. He is preaching at a time of relative prosperity and peace. However, his words are very harsh. Amos is the first prophet to actually write down his words and he does so after being driven out of Bethel for his preaching. According to Richard Foster in his book, *Celebration of Discipline*, study includes concentration, comprehension and reflection. Amos' words are full of fire, judgement but also grace. He doesn't choose to be the one to bring bad news to the people and the leadership. He does so because God has called him to bring the people of Israel and Judah back into a right relationship with God. *Today, please read the first six chapters of Amos. Mediate upon the images and metaphors. Study this prophet and see what his words have to say to us today.*

### Tuesday, July 17, 2018 Amos 7: 14-17

Amos has been told he is not to preach or prophesy again at the king's royal house and holy place. Preaching "truth to power" has never made a prophet popular. This ban is what created the book we have today. Amos wrote down his words and other prophets followed his example. It could not have been easy for Amos to preach of God's displeasure when things were going well for Israel and Judah. Yet Amos noticed how the people treated the poor, the outcast, the widow, the orphan and other vulnerable people badly. It would not do and Amos proclaimed that God was unhappy with his people. *Please read Amos chapters 6-9. The prophet uses more metaphors to describe the days that were coming and they would be terrible. The book ends though, with a promise of restoration. Study these chapters, write down those ways that God is speaking to you and how you might respond to God's call.*

### Wednesday, July 18, 2018 Mark 6: 14-16

John the Baptist was a prophet popular with the people but not with the religious leaders or political leaders. Herod hated and feared John. Like rulers of old, the prophets tended to speak truth to the rulers and usually did not mince words. In her book, *"Wearing God,"* Lauren Winner describes God as flame and fire. That image for God is used throughout scripture. God comes to Moses in the flame of a burning bush, God sends down fire to burn up an offering for Elijah. The people of Israel follow a pillar of fire and Jeremiah longs to quit being a prophet, but there is a fire in his bones. Most prophets speak because of that fire, they must speak even when their words are painful, shocking and uncomfortable. *As you study the verses today, ponder Herod's response to Jesus and John. What words have you heard that are causing some fire in your spirit? In what ways do you believe that God is causing you to be a prophetic voice?*

### Thursday, July 19, 2018 Mark 6: 18-20

Here we find out why Herod was so upset with John. Herod had broken the Jewish law but deeper in this story is that fact that both Herod and Herodias had divorced their spouses in order to marry each other. This is not in the gospel, but it was a bit scandalous at the time, particularly on Herodias' part. So Herod both respected John and feared and hated him. However there was a struggle between Herod and Herodias. The rest of the story, not read on Sunday, will be read tomorrow. Fire can come in different forms. If it compels a prophet to speak, it also burns in the heart and soul of someone who has done wrong, who has in traditional terms sinned. That burning can cause actions and reactions that are often terrible. *As you study this passage, can you identify with Herod and Herodias? Can you identify with John? Is there a time in your life when you have felt the same way as each of these persons?*

### Friday, July 20, 2018 Mark 6: 21-29

Herod had been protecting John, but in the end Herodias gets her way. It is important to understand that sometimes doing what is right is not rewarded, in fact the opposite can occur. One can be punished or hurt deeply and in John's case, not survive at all. The reason it is important to study the prophets is that it can become easy to go with the flow and to not stand up for what is right and good. Amos stood up in time when everything seemed good, but the treatment of the poor and the needy was horrible. John stood up to the religious and political leaders and called them to task. As followers of Christ, it is not always easy to do what is right and good. God puts a fire in our hearts and spirits. *What is God calling you to do and say? How are you being challenged to help the poor, the outcast and the needy? Today, say a prayer for God to guide and direct you that you might live out the love of Christ in all you say and do.*