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*Amos 5:6-7, 10-15. Seek the LORD and live, or he will sweep through the house of Joseph like a fire; it will devour, and Bethel will have no one to quench it. <sup>7</sup> You who turn justice into bitterness and cast righteousness to the ground <sup>11</sup> You trample on the poor and force him to give you grain. Therefore, though you have built stone mansions, you will not live in them; though you have planted lush vineyards, you will not drink their wine. <sup>12</sup> For I know how many are your offenses and how great your sins. You oppress the righteous and take bribes and you deprive the poor of justice in the courts. <sup>13</sup> Therefore the prudent man keeps quiet in such times, for the times are evil. <sup>14</sup> Seek good, not evil, that you may live. Then the LORD God Almighty will be with you, just as you say he is. <sup>15</sup> Hate evil, love good; maintain justice in the courts. Perhaps the LORD God Almighty will have mercy on the remnant of Joseph*

### **Seek the Lord and live.**

1. See how God has been so merciful to us.
2. See how the LORD might lead us to be merciful to others

Seek the LORD. That was Amos' encouragement to God's people. Seek the LORD and live. That remains valuable encouragement for us as well. We should seek him out, by meditating on his Word, considering his will for our life, concentrating on the cross of Christ, and considering how we might live lives of thanksgiving to the one who gives us all that we need for body and life. Seek the LORD and Live. In seeking the LORD, we are to look in to God's Word and there we see time and again that God has indeed been so merciful to us. Therefore, let us be merciful to others, for this is the LORD's will for your life.

Seek the LORD. Is this a phrase that reflect our daily relationship with God; or do we fall into the habit of sort of assuming the LORD is always with us and that should be good enough? In times of trouble and adversity, we may more actively seek the LORD's face, we come to him in prayer, we pick up our Bibles more attentively and seek comfort from the Scriptures – the Psalms, the Gospels, accounts of God's people struggling and how God supported them. Then again, we may not. Instead we may choose to 'dig down deep' and support ourselves, or we may look to material comforts and temporary fixes as we try to get by. Thus, it is that on any given day, our attention is drawn elsewhere, and especially in such good and ordinary times our attention has a rather hard time returning to the LORD. It is a rather common in human experience, it is human nature really, to take for granted our relationship with God as we actively seek after other things.

What exactly are those other things that we tend to think about and be concerned about more than our relationship with God? A few years ago, NBC news reported that a study had asked people to identify what part of their life they most often thought about. About one in four Americans said that money is the thing they think about most on a day to day basis, and another one in four spent most of their time thinking about work. In this same study the numbers stated that no matter the generational divide or age, nearly 60-65% of time during an average day was directed to thinking about work and money. While it might surprise us a bit initially, such a report is not that shocking because that's just kind of the way that our lives our laid out. If you think about our daily routines, we might match up well with that too. Think

about the time that you seek out ways to accomplish your work, identify ways to run your business more efficiently, the amount of time that expense and income reports and work schedules and financial obligations are running through your head. On top of that we might seek out opportunities to make a little more money, spend a little more money, or save a little more too. Some of us might spend a good amount of time as we rifle through the classifieds or plan visits to the latest auction or estate sale. We might flip through the circulars, we might scour for deals at rummage sales and online. We might also carve out time to consider different investments. We seek out the cost of entertainment and vacation options. We concern ourselves with the cost of caring for our property, or family, buying groceries, we daily deal with the cost of car and home repairs, doctor bills, and the list seems endless. It just takes up a lot of our time.

So the warning, the encouragement, that Amos, gives to God's people is one that would be good for us to hear, as well. Seek the LORD and Live. This was the encouragement, the rebuke, the call to repentance that God's people needed to hear from the prophet Amos. God's people had become complacent in their faith, they had taken on that attitude in which they had just assumed that because they were God's chosen people he would be with them and that would be good enough. So instead of seeking out the Lord, meditating on his Word, and daily inquiring of his will for their life; these words of Scripture indicate how God's people were spending far too much time thinking about their money, their property, and how they could earn, or save, have and enjoy more and more. And that thinking about getting more turned into the kind of activity that was not nearly as wholesome as clipping coupons or finding the best deal in town. Some had gone to the shameful extent of taking advantage of the needy and the poor. The well-to-do among God's people were extorting those who were financially vulnerable for their own financial gain, as they were actively seeking to satisfy their desire for more and more. And so, the prophet Amos cried out to them with these words of dire warning. Seek the LORD and live. God was coming like a fire to consume their house, they would not have time to enjoy all the stuff that they were storing up for themselves. Repent! Seek the LORD, and perhaps the LORD would have mercy. Repent! Seek the Lord and live.

As we seek out and study who our LORD is, the Scriptures make it clear that God, while just and righteous, is also abounding in grace and mercy. The LORD had supplied his people with all that they needed. He had given the people of Israel and Judah a land rich in resources. For a time, he had fended off enemies who wanted to take these blessings from them. God had daily guarded and protected them, he had provided for all their needs.

In return for all God's daily providence and care this was the kind of thanks that people gave the LORD: disinterest and disobedience. Generally uninterested in him the people looked to their material wealth and gave those things their attention, their heart, their time, and devotion, instead of giving it to the LORD. In looking so intently at the gift they had overlooked the Giver. And then in their sinful greed and their quest for more, with arms already full they reached out for excesses and dropped that which was good. Good and upright neighborly goodness, God-pleasing righteousness and decency, it all turned sour and bitter, and then it fell to the ground and was trampled underfoot as the people had their sights fixed on more - on having enough to ensure themselves a life filled with luxuries and niceties. And the LORD had seen it all. Even though they had not sought him out, that did not mean he had lost his focus on them. Thus the LORD says to his people, <sup>12</sup> ***For I know how many are your offenses and how***

***great your sins. You oppress the righteous and take bribes and you deprive the poor of justice in the courts.*** God knew their offenses. He had seen it all.

But before we go home today only taking with us tales of those wicked people dancing in our heads and falling from our lips; like the prudent man mentioned in these verses we too must keep silent for the days are evil. We too have been guilty of plenty offenses against our God and against those around us; and God has seen it all. Before we shake a finger at those people of Joseph who sat in stone cut houses and paid far too much attention to their lush vineyards, we too must admit that we have been selfish, and godless in the ways that we have handled the wealth that God has given us. Looking so intently upon the gifts God has given to us, we have so often, so carelessly, overlooked the Giver. We have failed to give thanks and to rightly inquire of the LORD and follow his will for what he would have us do with the gifts that he has given us. We have paid far too much attention to our own endeavors, our own interests, our own investments and fields and houses, and we have fallen short of tending to the needs of others. We too have been guilty in reaching for excesses and luxuries as we let the needs of others fall to the ground. Some of us have stretched ourselves too thin, piling up debt so deep that we are unable or incapable of helping those in need. Or we have become so accustomed to investing so much in our own well-being and in our own comfort that we become hesitant or even flat-out unwilling to proportionately and regularly and gladly give to God and neighbor. And this sin of greed and selfishness is not content to simply come as some sort of occasional nuisance. It wants to take over, and our sinful hearts are not only easy targets but often willing participants in this path that leads many away from God, as wealth and prosperity and comfort become household gods.

Dear children of God, seek the LORD and live. Behold his generous mercy. God knows how many our offenses, he knows exactly and how frequently we have fallen short, yet he continues to give us all that we need and then some. He continues in his mercy and grace to pour out his generous blessings upon us. He gives us all that we need for body and soul. Daily, our good and merciful Father, supplies us with clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, and all that we own. (He still in some cases even continues to literally provide land and cattle – just as we learned this list in our Catechism days and the study of the First Article.) He does this certainly not because we have somehow earned or deserved it; but only because of his goodness, his grace, and his mercy. On top of all his daily generosity, the LORD in his mercy also gives to me, gives to you, a priceless treasure, as he provides for us his only, his eternal Son. The perfect, compassionate, and merciful Jesus goes to the cross with our selfish sins, our greed, our ingratitude, and he pays for them all. The LORD God does the impossible as he takes on flesh and keeps all of the Law perfectly for us, and then dies the death that we deserved. Jesus wipes our debt to God so clean in his blood that we are so spotless through his perfect sacrifice that God remembers our great and many sins no more so that we enter into God's house through the narrow door of Jesus Christ and we may dwell in the house of the Lord forever. God is generous in his mercy. He is abounding in love.

Seek the LORD, inquire of him in his word, search the Scriptures and here you will see that God is merciful. Seek the LORD and see that He is by very nature perfect and yet patient, holy yet gracious, just yet merciful. We see this so clearly in the person of Jesus, whose death perfectly satisfied the justice of God while also flawlessly displaying his mercy and grace. Seek the LORD and live in the light of his mercy and grace. Spend some careful time meditating daily on his mercy, his grace, and his will for your life. Seek the LORD and live.

The Almighty God would come with the destruction he had promised upon the house of Joseph, upon his own people because of their wicked disobedience and their idolatry. For not only had they bowed down to false idols of wood and stone, but they had given their hearts and lives over to money and goods. In his great love he warned them, he called out to them, however in his justice he could no longer tolerate their defiance of his will. However, in his great mercy, a remnant of these people would remain, so that his promise of an eternal Savior would not be extinguished, would not be snuffed out. A Savior would come from these people to bring eternal mercy and forgiveness to all.

In view of all these mercies our God has shown to us, let us take heed of God's warning, God's call. Let us resist that which is worldly and evil and threatens God's rule in our hearts. Let us hold on to the good that God has given us as we recognize that he gives us we need. Let us seek the LORD of mercy and live lives of mercy out of endless gratitude to God.

With a few more words of Luther's explanation of the First Article of the Apostles Creed, we are rightly encouraged: *For all this I ought to thank and praise, serve and obey.* As we live thankful lives that give praise and glory to God, how we will serve and obey our God? Well, let's inquire of God and seek out his will for us. And in these words, from the prophet Amos, God's prophet implores God's people to seek the Lord and live and he also tells us <sup>14</sup> ***Seek good, not evil, that you may live. Then the LORD God Almighty will be with you, just as you say he is.*** <sup>15</sup> ***Hate evil, love good;***

Hate evil, love God. Hate is a strong word, but God so absolutely wants us to resist and shun and detest anything that would pry us away from our LORD. So let us shun and detest the wicked and dishonest practices and activities that have become common place in our world today. Let us turn away from selfish and overindulgent practices that so often interfere and harm our relationship with God and our neighbor. Instead of looking for ways to exploit others for personal gain, or spending so much of our time fretting over ways to increase our personal worth so that we may have a few more luxurious and niceties, let us consider how you and I can use the gifts God has given to us to serve God and support and lift up others as we reflect the goodness and mercy and joyful generosity that God has shown to us.

Seek good, not evil, as we live for God. Let us embrace the good habits of seeing that all good things come from God, so that we may give to God accordingly. Let us with a thankful heart and a generous spirit support the work of the church, give to our local congregation and synod, so that the good news of God's mercy in Jesus may continue to be proclaimed. Let us take on the good practices of caring for the needs of our families and the needs of others, giving and contributing to charities, supporting local benefits, praying for and supporting others within the fellowship of the church. In times like this may the LORD put on our hearts the opportunity to help those effected by the hurricanes and other natural disasters. Let the Lord help us as we manage the wealth that he has given us, balancing rightly what are needs and what are wants so that we may not, in reaching to grab onto excesses let those good practices of kindness and generosity fall to the ground. Let us be generous and merciful, good and gracious, as our God has been generous and merciful, good and kind, to us.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, listen to the prophet's call: Seek the Lord and live. See how God has been so merciful to us. See how the LORD might lead us to be merciful to others. Amen.