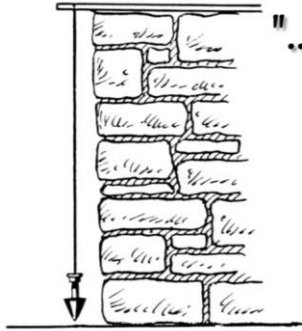


By: Rev. Wendy Depew Partelow

Rev. Wendy Depew Partelow is Vice President of the American Baptist Churches of New York State Board of Missions.

**Plumb Line**

This week, with the election behind us (sort of), I've been thinking about America - the USA, and how fractured we are, how broken, how we seem to have two very different kinds of people dwelling



"... see, I am setting  
a plumb line  
in the midst of  
my people..."  
Amos 7:8

in the same nation, living within the same set of rules - basically - and how differently those two kinds of people seem to interpret those *rules*. It occurred to me that in many ways it is similar to what is happening in the Middle East - the ages long battle over the Holy Land - whose is it? Who gets to make the rules? Who governs and where are the boundaries? It really is all about power. Who has the power and who wants the power and how can we get more power to shape the country the way WE think it ought to be?

These past few months, with the virus raging and the blurring of truth and lies so that no one is exactly sure what the truth is any more, I have been focusing on one Truth - God is in control. Whoever thinks they have the power and whoever thinks they are powerless one truth remains - God has the power. And God's power is - for better or worse - often seen in the works of God's people. When greed and the lust for power tip to far to the right or the left, then kingdoms topple and systems break down.

I was so discouraged about the balance of power in this country that I decided to read Amos. Amos is famous for that one verse: *Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.*

(Amos 5:24)

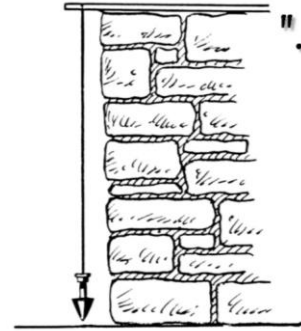
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Basically what Amos says *to me* is that no matter who we THINK is control, God is ultimately and forever in control.

Amos talks about God *standing beside a wall built with a plumb line, with a plumb line in his hand...see, I am setting a plumb line in the midst of my people... (Amos 7:7-8)* Now a plumb line makes things straight - it helps buildings to stand firm so that it neither leans too far to the left or too far to the right - but is balanced.

And so I see that we need to set a plumb line up so that our country is more balanced - not leaning too far to the left or too far to the right - because if a tower leans too far either way, eventually it will topple.

The system that has been set up - over 200 years ago - was designed to be adapted as the country grew. And the system was set up with a plumb line, with a balance of power between Legislative (those who make the laws), Judicial (those who evaluate the law), and the Executive (those carry out the law). The system was designed with checks and balances so that no one branch has more power than the next. But, in order for the system to be effective each person elected as representative within that branch of power must respect the system and see that it be maintained so that *justice may roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.*

Any system requires maintenance in order to retain its effectiveness, and that means that the people elected to those branches of power must be willing to work *within the system*, for the betterment of the whole. And if the system needs to be changed, it must first be *understood* in it's original form, taking into account the amendments that have been made over the years, always using the plumb line to consider and maintain the balance of power for the best outcome for all the people.

Amos was written about 200 years before the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in roughly 587 BCE. There was bitterness and war and famine and strife, but God promised restoration and healing and wholeness, and in that promise there is hope.

We have to hold out hope that a plumb line will be used to restore the balance of power, so that the United States of America can once again be seen as a country of integrity, honesty, and heart.

A phrase has been on my lips for the last few weeks, and I close with this prayer: Heavenly Father, I pray for a kinder, gentler America to emerge ... and for our balance to be restored. *Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.* Amen.

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