

“Plum Pudding and a Plumb Line”

Christmas Eve, 2008

Amos 7:7-8

(God becomes a Plumb Line for the people, showing the way.)

It is Christmas Eve.

Is anyone serving plum pudding for dessert this Christmas? It’s a little late to start baking a plum pudding for *this* Christmas. Bakers traditionally start Plum Puddings at the start of the Advent season for the *next* year. That is, they began in Advent 2007 for the Christmas pudding to be eaten tomorrow—Christmas 2008!

This raises the question, “What do they *do* with the pudding in the meantime? It is said to be good luck for every member of the family to take a turn stirring the batter. However, what the cook *does* for a year is to “feed” the pudding. The cook feeds the pudding a little “spirits,” that is, a pour of rum or brandy, to “keep it moist.” Maybe that’s how the expression began, “The proof is in the pudding.”

We cite the prophet Isaiah often as we get ready for Christmas, because Isaiah imagined the birth of Jesus, the Prince of Peace. Another prophet, Amos, had all sorts of visions, but by far the one he’s most famous for is his vision of the plumb line.

Have any of you hung a picture on a wall? Have any of you put up a *wall*? How do you know when you’ve got it “straight”?

If you’re stranded without the tools of the trade—you can find any string, over 5 feet long, put a weight at the end, and “let it hang, let it hang, let it hang.” If the top of the string holds still—you probably don’t want to ask a wiggly child to get up on a chair to hold it—then the line created by the string will be vertical! Due to gravity, the weighted string will be pulled toward the middle of the earth.¹

According to Amos' vision, God shows him an object, then asks Amos what that object is. Amos' answer was so confusing that for centuries, readers, translators, and Bible commentators debated what that object was. In Medieval times, some commentators called the object a "plumb line," and that conclusion stuck—because it makes sense for what the vision was about anyway.

Amos' vision of the plumb line was a way of understanding what God was doing with us humans. *God would show us how to be vertical, straight up, upright.*

There is a fascinating connection between this plumb line that God can be for us and the plum pudding that takes a year and four weeks to make.

The metaphorical plumb line would show us the way to "everlasting peace." That way is through justice—uprightness. Peace only lasts when there is justice for all, when everyone is vertical, upright.

Plum pudding must be fed with spirits, for a long time. So, too, does peace have to be fed, with little pours of the spirit of justice. Isn't that exactly what the Prince of Peace did? He went about noticing injustice and righting it, a little at a time. He did so much of this spirit-pouring that the little acts added up, and people began to see that the big picture would change because of small actions.

Whenever we defend someone who is too-quickly judged by others, because we know that only that person knows the whole story, we help that one to stand tall, and the spirit of peace is poured forth.

A gesture of equality in a relationship that is defined by others as "hierarchical," a gesture of gentleness in a relationship that has been harsh, a word of truth in a

relationship in which it has been very hard to speak truth—all these gestures are little pours of the spirit of justice and peace.

Whenever we look at someone who is labeled an “enemy” and see a beloved child of God, we are measuring according to the plumb line, and the spirit of peace is poured.

We have a lot of work to do, “feeding” justice—living up to the clarity of the message of Jesus the man. It may take us more than a year and four weeks, but it makes all the difference in our attitude toward others, ourselves, and life itself, if we sense that we’re always in a kind of Advent—the advent of this “endless peace” that we keep feeding with little acts of justice, no matter what.

May we feast on and with joy, hope, love, and justice.

¹ Sort of. I also learned that there are a couple “middles” of the earth—depending upon whether you speak of the earth’s “mass” or “geography”—well, that does not matter for hanging a picture.