

Sermon for Sunday, Nov. 9, 2025

Amos 1:1-2 and 5:14-15 and 21-24

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable to you Oh Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

Some time ago a well-meaning parishioner came to me and said, "Pastor, you've got to keep politics out of your sermon. Just stick with the Bible and you'll be fine." There's a bit of a problem with that stance. Sticking with today's Scripture reading exemplifies that challenge because Amos is speaking to the people with power and calling them to perform acts of justice. Like it or not Amos' call is all about politics.

Beginning last Sunday we started a series of readings from the Old Testament prophets. These readings will continue until mid-December. One point that I didn't emphasize last week was that Elijah was speaking to the people in Israel with political and religious power. He was addressing a king, a queen, and the priests of Baal. Remember also that the Israelites lived at a time when government and religion were deeply enmeshed; so much so that it was almost impossible to separate the two. Elijah was immersed in a political situation and called by God to speak into the political systems of the day.

The same is true for the prophet Amos.

Prophets are not telling you an historical story [meaning a narrative based on real world events.] They strive to do one of two things: either they will draw your attention to something you aren't paying attention to [like a real world injustice] or they will draw your attention to a divine truth that you aren't paying attention to. They are often intentionally provocative. (Bibleworm) Prophets tend to look at the circumstances of their world, recognize how the actions of the people and the government have strayed from the way God wants people (us) to act, and then speak about the logical consequences of what will happen if the humans (we) continue to act as they are.

This analysis of prophetic words is true for both Elijah and Amos.

To Amos the principal sin that he is addressing is *injustice*....Amos [laments] against evil *deeds*. (The Prophets by Heschel, pg 74) According to Abraham Heschel (a well-known Jewish scholar who specialized in the OT prophets) Justice is not an ancient custom, a

human convention, [or] a value, but a transcendent demand, freighted with divine concern..., it is an *act* involving God.... Justice is [God's] line, righteousness His plummet. It is not ONE of His ways, but integral to ALL His ways. (Heschel pg 253)

This quote from Heschel is full of big ideas. It also resets the way we should think about justice as Amos would describe it. Justice is as much a part of God's way/God's actions as breathing. Here's what I mean: No one expects to receive a reward for the habit of breathing. Justice is as much a necessity as breathing is, and a constant occupation. (Heschel pg 254) Because God is just, it is expected that we are to always act with justice in our world. It is our job to look at the people around us and treat them in a manner that exemplifies God's justice.

But, wait....what does that mean for our daily lives? It means that when we wake up in the morning we are to be consistently occupied with actions that make the world a place of justice for all. And that's hard because we, my friends, occupy positions of privilege. We are part of a white Christian majority and I dare say that you have never experienced discrimination. We have never been excluded from purchasing a house in a particular neighborhood because of our skin color. We have never been threatened as we walk on a public sidewalk because of the way we dress or because of the color of our skin. We have never had our faith practices questioned or spurned as irrelevant. But these situations are common experiences for many in our country and that's not just. It is not the way of God.

How do we make the world a place of justice for all? Let's begin by considering how Jesus lived. Who did Jesus spend time with? Who did he eat with? Many of the people were social outcasts: he ate at the home of a man called "Simon the leper." He healed the servant of a Roman centurion. He cast demons out of the Gerasene demoniac. Jesus exemplified God's justice by spending time with the very people that the elite had judged unworthy.

What did he teach about banquets? Luke 14:13-14 But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. 14 And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous." Feeding people who are hungry and expecting nothing in return: that's how God lives and breathes justice. And I'm thinking God's not worried about a screening process as to whether a person fits into the categories I just named.

Amos used a word picture to describe the effects of justice: roll down like waters. We are familiar with what happens when rain starts and doesn't stop. You may remember the failure of the Rapidan Dam near Blue Earth and how roaring flood waters eroded the river bank eventually causing a house and store to fall into the river. That rain began with a few drops. It continued until the rainwater became a mighty torrent. Amos is suggesting that justice is a force like water: that it can begin with one small act focused on justice for one person and ultimately bring forth a mighty wave of justice for all people. Through the power of God one small act of justice can turn into something equivalent to a flood that changes the landscape.

In a few moments we are going to go out to the flagpole and exchange flags. As we do so we will acknowledge all of our veterans and remember those who sacrificed their lives and their well-being so that we might live free. In 1941 FDR articulated four freedoms: So that we might worship in freedom. So that we might speak freely. So that we might have freedom from fear and finally freedom from want. That's one way of describing justice: that these four freedoms might be available for all people.

We claim that the Bible is the inspired word of God. We believe that it is a living document that God uses to speak to us, even today. That being the case then we must pay attention to the messages that God brings to us through the reading of these words. Today's Scripture reading, inspired by God, is a message about the need for justice throughout the world. Justice as a fundamental part of God's being is our call to action.

Let us pray: Lord, we are slow to come to our senses. Often our feeble offerings are merely extensions of our sin. Quicken your Spirit within us and move us to offer up that which is pleasing to you: justice, kindness, and humility of heart. Amen.