

This week we move from a selection of stories of call, to the call of the prophets to justice, a new way of being, a return to the original call of God known in creation as living fully together as the imago dei (the image of God). Amos is the earliest prophet to have his words written down, and so the oldest prophetic book of the Bible.

“His message marks a distinct turning point in the history of our biblical faith. Amos, as a representative of God’s word, announces that the [northern] nation of Israel has been judged for its failures to be obedient to God’s will and must perish as a consequence. This is a shocking message...There were prophets before him,” who boldly declared divine judgement but none proclaimed it against the entirety of the nation.

“Prophets before Amos (Elijah) and after (Hosea) singled out purity of worship and the apostasy of idolatry as special concerns. ... Amos charges that Israel loves the sanctuaries and their rituals more than the God whom they are intended to honor. He sees in Israel’s life a piety that has become an end in itself, ritual that has become self-justifying. It is the hypocrisy of ritual piety alongside a lack of justice and righteousness that Amos singles out, and he announces that God hates such worship and will not accept it” (in particular in chapter 5).

**in the days of:** it’s thought that Amos prophesied from 760-750 B.C.E. Uzziah reigned in the Southern Kingdom (Judah) 783-742 B.C.E. Jeroboam II in the North (Israel) 786-746 B.C.E.

**Seek good:** These verses are part of the whole of Amos 5:1-17 – an summons to a new way of living. This phrase hides a play on words. The people would seek God, knowledge of divine will, by going to the Lord’s Temple in Bethel in ritual prayer and offerings. Here they are invited to seek to do good actively in their lives, not just in worship, but in the nitty gritty of every moment, all relationships, and each financial transaction. טוב [tov] *good* – as in what God calls creation (Genesis 1:10), what life is (Genesis 2:9), the life God calls us to (Psalm 23:6). Amos 5:10-13 lays out the evil that they do as their indifference to the poor, their refusal to see a connection between all peoples, specifically the rich and poor – in particular in a time of growing wealth in Israel.

**God of hosts:** יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ [YHWH sabaoth] “LORD of Hosts (or Armies)” as a title for Yahweh which occurs some 261 times in the First Testament Scriptures. First used in 1 Samuel 1:3, it’s a way of saying “LORD of hosts” of the “God of the armies of heaven.” It’s often translated as “LORD Almighty.”

**Justice | righteousness:** these two words are often conveyed in Hebrew by same word, צְדָקָה [tsadeq] “**righteousness**” to be just or righteous, related to the court notion of being acquitted, innocent, vindicated, properly restored or declared right, one to whom justice is given by a king or judge. Here the second word is tsadeq, while the first is מִשְׁפָּט [mishpat] “**Justice**” or “judgement” as in a case, cause, charge, claim or decision. Mishpatim can be understood as powerful principles of law which apply uniformly for all individuals to uphold a standard of justice and fairness in the world.

## SCRIPTURES FOR SUNDAY 11.12.2017

Amos 1:1-2; 5:14-15, 21-24; John 7:37-38

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

Amos 1:1-2; 5:14-15, 21-24

<sup>1</sup> The words of Amos, who was among the shepherds of Tekoa, which he saw concerning Israel *in the days of* King Uzziah of Judah and *in the days of* King Jeroboam son of Joash of Israel, two years before the earthquake.

<sup>2</sup> And [Amos] said:

The Lord roars from Zion,  
and utters his voice from Jerusalem;  
the pastures of the shepherds wither,  
and the top of Carmel dries up.

**5**<sup>14</sup> *Seek good* and not evil,  
that you may live;  
and so the Lord, the **God of hosts**, will be with you,  
just as you have said.  
<sup>15</sup> Hate evil and love good,  
and establish **justice** in the gate;  
it may be that the Lord, the God of hosts,  
will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph.

<sup>21</sup> I hate, I despise your **FESTIVALS**,  
and I take no delight in your **SOLEMN ASSEMBLIES**.

<sup>22</sup> Even though you offer me *your burnt offerings* and *grain offerings*,

I will not accept them;  
and the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals  
I will not look upon.

<sup>23</sup> Take away from me the noise of your songs;  
I will not listen to the melody of your harps.

<sup>24</sup> But let **justice** roll down like waters,  
and **righteousness** like an ever-flowing stream.

A person's personal circumstances or socio-economic status does not give them any special consideration. Mishpatim represent the idea of retributive justice or "equal justice under the law." One could say that *tsadeq* is more "the spirit of the law" whereas *mishpat* is the "letter of the law".

**FESTIVALS | SOLEMN ASSEMBLIES** : God doesn't seem to reject their religious language in itself, but rather to reject their worship because of its hypocrisy, that it is completely divorced from a justice and righteousness, practiced and lived by both individuals and the community as a whole.

*your burnt offerings | grain offerings: burnt offerings* talked of in Lev 1; 6:8-13; 8:18-21; 16:24, were animal sacrifices which were then completely burned in fire: a Bull, ram or bird (dove or young pigeon for the poor); without defect. They were offered as a voluntary act of worship; atonement for unintentional sin in general; expression of devotion, commitment and complete surrender to God

*grain offerings* talked of in Lev 2; 6:14-23 were offerings of Grain, fine flour, olive oil, incense, baked bread (cakes or wafers) there were a voluntary act of worship; recognition of God's goodness and provisions; devotion to God. God seems to be saying that no matter how well the people "go through the motions" of proper worship that the spirit of their prayer is reprehensible and wrong. Our actions and words are indissociable.

**FESTIVAL** : the Feast of Tabernacles (Sukkoth) - An eight day feast of ingathering. This final feast of the year is a celebration of ingathering at the end of the harvest (Exodus 23:16) and is a time of rejoicing and fellowship. It symbolizes the gathering or harvest of God's people.

### Questions for the practice of Examen & Contemplation

- What shimmers for you in these passages?
- What word, phrase or image touches your life today?
- How have you experienced the pursuit of justice and/or righteousness in the Church?
- How does our worship reflect justice? How does our just or righteous living reflect worship of the God of life?
- How did this prophetic word speak to ancient Israel in the 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E.? How might it be speaking to us in the America, California, Oakland of 2017 today?

John 7:37-38

<sup>37</sup> On the last day of the **FESTIVAL**, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, <sup>38</sup> and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, 'Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water.'"

### "I HAVE A DREAM"

(excerpt famously quoting Amos 5:24)

delivered by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., on August 28, 1963

..." In the process of gaining our rightful place, we must not be guilty of wrongful deeds. Let us not seek to satisfy our thirst for freedom by drinking from the cup of bitterness and hatred.

We must forever continue our struggle on the high plane of dignity and discipline. We must not allow our creative protest to degenerate into physical violence. Again and again we must rise to the majestic heights of meeting physical force with soul force.

The marvelous new militancy which has engulfed the Negro community must not lead us to a distrust of all white people -- for many of our white brothers, as evidenced by their presence here today, have come to realize that their destiny is inextricably tied up with our destiny. They have come to realize that their freedom is inextricably bound to our freedom.

We cannot walk alone, and as we walk, we must make the pledge that we shall always march ahead. We cannot turn back. There are those who are asking the devotees of civil rights: "When will you be satisfied?" We can never be satisfied as long as the Negro is the victim of the unspeakable horrors of police brutality. We can never be satisfied as long as our bodies, heavy with the fatigue of travel, cannot gain lodging in the motels of the highways and the hotels of the cities. We cannot be satisfied as long as the Negro's basic mobility is from a smaller ghetto to a larger one. We can never be satisfied as long as our children are stripped of their selfhood and robbed of their dignity by signs stating "For Whites Only." We cannot be satisfied so long as the Negro in Mississippi cannot vote and the Negro in New York believes he has nothing for which to vote. No, no, we are not satisfied and will not be *satisfied until justice rolls down like water and righteousness like a mighty stream.*" ...