

1:1-2 These are the words of Amos, one of the shepherds of Tekoa. He perceived these things concerning Israel two years before the earthquake, in the days of Judah's King Uzziah and in the days of Israel's King Jeroboam, Joash's son.

He said:

The Lord roars from Zion.

He shouts from Jerusalem;

the pastures of the shepherds wither,
and the top of Carmel dries up.

5: 14-15 Seek good and not evil,
that you may live;
and so the Lord, the God of heavenly forces,
will be with you just as you have said.
Hate evil, love good,
and establish justice at the city gate.
Perhaps the Lord God of heavenly forces
will be gracious to what is left of Joseph.

5:21-24 I hate, I reject your festivals;
I don't enjoy your joyous assemblies.
If you bring me your entirely burned offerings and gifts of food—
I won't be pleased;
I won't even look at your offerings of well-fed animals.
Take away the noise of your songs;
I won't listen to the melody of your harps.
But let justice roll down like waters,
and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. (Common English Bible)

I shared some heavy prayer requests in the e-news this week. Neighbors living in low-income apartments near the ICE facility are struggling to breathe because of all the tear gas dust and residue in their living space. Kindred at Covenant Gresham are dealing with ICE raids on their church property. I've heard from some of you that you have witnessed masked agents chasing down construction workers. Others have told me they hear helicopters overhead most days. And meanwhile, people aren't receiving the food assistance on which they rely and food ministries are seeing a surge in demand, and still the government is shut down and people are out of work or are working without pay. And this is just domestic matters. I heard news this week of another genocide unfolding in Sudan. And still other wars rage. I feel like I offer

litanies like this so often. The state of our planet is a mess — a terrifying rate of environmental degradation, storms getting more frequent and intense, fires that rage. Some days, many days, it truly seems like we're on the brink...

...Like in the days of the prophet Amos. The opening of his book dates itself by suggesting it came 2 years before the earthquake. It's clear from imagery in our readings today that the moment when the prophet speaks God's word is a rough one — a time of severe drought... and a time of great injustice. The earthquake ahead was not the worst of it, either. As we learned last week, the kingdom was divided and people were choosing evil over good all over the place— elites oppressing the poor, children and young women being violated— and all the while people of faith were gathering for worship and putting on festivals... as if all was as it should be. And Amos, a shepherd, like so many whom God calls, roars out a word from God, a shout for justice.

Last week God came in a thin, quiet sound. This week in a roar. Sometimes it takes a lot for God to get our attention, it would seem.

Amos suggests that the people of Israel are on the brink — judgment is coming and it's not going to be pretty. If you read the whole book (and it's not that long, so why not?) if you read the whole book you'll see this is the force of his message. I once heard a scholar say that if you think you like Amos, you don't understand him. Because he has a hard word for all of us. A word of judgment.

But all is not lost... As it tends to be with prophetic pronouncements, a word of promise, a vision of what God wills to bring about, follows on chastisement and challenge. Still, says the prophet, still it is possible for the people to choose good over evil. Still it is possible that they might receive God's favor and not God's wrath. How? Let justice roll down like mighty waters, righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

Here in Oregon we know something about mighty waters. Well, just imagine the power of this image in the midst of drought. What do we see? We see justice and

righteousness as dynamic, living rapids. Justice and righteousness as terrain-shaping currents.

Justice: returning to folks what rightly belongs to them.

Justice: the righting of wrongs committed in violation of trust;

Justice: the return of stolen property. That is, God provides enough for everyone to live. Yet some have more than they need while others have far less than they need. So for justice to be done some sharing needs to take place.

And righteousness?

I think righteousness is about right relationship —

right relationship with God and right relationship with neighbor.

In Hebrew one word is translated as both justice and righteousness... So justice and righteousness are deeply related movements of God. When we commit ourselves to the cause of justice and righteousness, we find ourselves swept into those movements... a living, dynamic stream... just acts merging with other just acts, cumulatively nurturing change.

The worship of God in this time and place aims to shape us into seekers and doers of justice in our daily lives. When we do not allow it to do so, Amos shouts, "You're wasting your time! You're insulting your God."

God's word voiced by Amos resonates in our midst today for at least two powerful reasons:

- 1) The state of our world right now;
- 2) What God is about to do in this season.

We are in the midst of our annual stewardship campaign. In two weeks we will dedicate commitments for 2026. To prepare for this commitment Sunday we are reflecting on the message that we are never alone and remembering that we belong to a Christian community of compassion and care. We are remembering that God is always with us and that we embody God's presence for one another and for neighbors

in need. When we make commitments, financial or otherwise, we do not do this as an act of empty religiosity, but as an act of grateful trust and praise. We trust that the resources we share will pool together to make a difference in our world, that we will be more able to connect with Christ and each other to serve our neighbors because we all share gifts of time, treasure, and talent. When we freely surrender our gifts and intentions to God, they can be swept into the living stream of righteousness that satiates the dry and brittle land, that brings hope where there is despair, life where there is death. God will do this with the gifts we commit, the gifts we share. God will enable us to come together as mighty river, so justice can flow in our unjust world. This is what God will do with the commitments we make.

We need God all the time. We know we need God when we're on the brink. We demonstrate our trust in God and our faithfulness to God by dedicating ourselves to sharing in God's justice and righteousness through our acts of generosity. May justice and righteousness flow like a mighty stream from the community of St. Andrew's to our thirsty world.

Credits:

The workingpreacher.org narrative lectionary podcast https://www.workingpreacher.org/narrative_podcast.aspx?podcast_id=936.

The definitions of justice were derived from an essay by Walter Brueggeman that I read years ago.

I am grateful to the Rev. Dr. Jay Koyle for his assistance with the editing of this sermon.