

**LECTIONARY SERIES**  
**November 4, 2020**

**LESSONS FOR PENTECOST 23**

**Prayer of the Day**

O God of justice and love, you illumine our way throughout life with the words of your Son. Give us the light we need, and awaken us to the needs of others, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen

**Amos 5:18-24**

Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

Amos is the earliest Biblical prophet to refer to the *Day of the Lord*. Later references include Ezekiel 30:1-4 and Joel 2:1-2 and Zephaniah 1:14-18. These passages made clear that the *Day of the Lord* was an eschatological time. God would punish the earth and the whole earth would be consumed.

Amos was exasperated that the people seemed to be rejoicing in the prospect of its coming. He announced it would be a day of darkness and destruction. It would be not only for the enemies of Israel but for Israel as well. God would hold Israel accountable for their sins along with the foreign nations. In Amos 1-2 there are stirring oracles of doom against the surrounding nations. Unexpectedly Judah and Israel appear as the last of the nations in the series.

Perhaps the ritual offerings and sacrifices could save them. No! Cherished traditions of Israel were not to cause the people to be complacent. Instead they were measures of accountability to God. Amos mocked their misguided hopes. He rejected their supposed liturgical expressions of faithfulness. In the end he proclaimed the terrifying advent of the justice and righteousness of God.

We must not read into this a dismissal of our liturgical practices. In Biblical history there was a deep connection between liturgy and justice. Festivals and solemn assemblies articulated formative truths about who God was to Israel. Faithful observances were commanded by God –  
Festival of Passover commemorated the deliverance of Israel from slavery in Egypt.  
Festival of Tabernacles celebrated the resilience of the people in its 40-year pilgrimage.  
Other festivals celebrated the offering of the first fruits to God.  
Day of Atonement emphasized the awareness of sin in the Israelite community.

Each ritual renewed Israel before God.  
Where is the disconnect?  
God stands with the poor.  
Those who do not show compassion to the poor cannot possibly be worshiping God.  
God whom we worship is an uncompromising God of justice.

Verse 24 is not a rousing call to believers to do good deeds.  
It is a roar of outrage because of the hypocrisy of the community of faith.  
Justice of God will roll down like floodwaters (from the Hebrew).

Ritual observance and compassion for the powerless cannot be separated.  
God formed Israel to be both holy and merciful.  
What God condemns is a ritual without heart.

### **Additional Thoughts**

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#### **Psalm 70**

You are my helper and my deliverer.  
O Lord do not tarry.

Psalm 70 is a prayer from an individual who seeks protection from God.  
Speaker is among those who consider themselves to be deeply devoted servants of God.  
Psalm is framed with repetitions that speak of the urgent need for help.

With minor variations the words from this psalm are duplicated in Psalm 40:13-17.  
In Psalm 40 these verses come at the end of a psalm of thanksgiving.  
Repetition of texts is used to show that the prayers are adaptable for different life circumstances.  
One of the variations between the texts is the use of the divine name –  
In Psalm 40 the Hebrew word is YHWH which means *the Lord*.  
In Psalm 70 the Hebrew word is Elohim which means *God*.

Psalm 70 is part of the Elohist Psalter (Psalms 42-83).  
Writer prefers the more generic term for the divine name.  
Collection begins with Book II of the Hebrew Psalter (Psalms 42-72).  
It continues into Book III with the Korahite and Asaphite collections.  
\* Sons of Korah were the sons of Moses' nephew (Numbers 16).  
\* Asaph was one of the Levites that King David assigned as worship leader (1 Chronicles 16).  
Overlapping collections and repetition of phrases reflects the editorial process used.  
Psalm 70 is also closely related to Psalm 71 both verbally and thematically.

Prayer opens with a brief and urgent plea for God to deliver him.  
Plea is that the opponents would experience the same thing they desired for him.

Prayer is for a divine act of justice and a reversal of fortunes.  
Evil intent of the enemies would rebound and be put upon their own heads.  
Speaker seeks to be counted among the faithful who are delivered and blessed by God.  
He asks to be included among the righteous and not the wicked.  
Righteous are those who seek God.  
They will rejoice and praise God.  
Outcome is completely dependent upon God.  
Plea is for God to act as the covenant God of the faith tradition.  
Prayer is a covenant interaction.  
Context is a trust that God will come and hear and respond.  
It is an offering of an honest prayer of one in great need.

### **Additional Thoughts**

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#### **1 Thessalonians 4:13-18**

Encourage one another with these words.

Writer addressed a major concern of the recipients of the letter –  
What will become of the members of the community who die before the *Parousia*.  
Paul gave a pastoral response more than a theological truth.  
Verses are often used by people to explain their understanding of the *Rapture*.

When we last heard from Paul he was reminding the congregation of his own work.  
He highlighted the support needed for the ongoing mission of proclaiming the gospel of God.  
He also urged the congregation to lead a life worthy of God.  
From there Paul expressed his desire to be with the Thessalonians in person.  
In Chapters 4 and 5 Paul appeals to them to live according to the faith they have exemplified.  
Faith is the grounds for encouragement to (and steadfastness in) living a life pleasing to God.  
It is a life they were already doing but they should do so more and more.

Our lesson marks a shift in emphasis to the coming of the Lord.  
To unpack the implications of the *Parousia* we need to read 5:1-11 (next Sunday).  
In a pastoral way Paul wants the people to draw comfort and encouragement in the face of loss.  
Hope is in the Lord Jesus Christ but more specifically in his return.  
Hope is not simply a future wish but one that lays claim on life now.  
Future hope should make a difference for how life is lived now and what is at stake.  
It is a hope that distinguishes believers from others.

Basis of that hope is that Jesus died and rose again.  
Ground for our hope is based on what Jesus has already done.  
Makes his words not wishful thinking but the comforting presence of Christ.  
Return of Jesus was the comfort and consolation they needed at their particular time.  
For Paul there is a union of those who have died with those who mourn their passing.  
Comfort is offered in what the Lord will provide (even in his absence).

### **Additional Thoughts**

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#### **Matthew 25:1-13**

Keep awake for you know neither the day nor the hour.

*Parable of the Bridesmaids* stands second in a series of four parables found in Matthew.  
All bear upon the relationship between the return of Jesus and a final sorting.  
*Parable of the Talents* (third in the series) has a parallel in Luke.  
But it also reflects a distinctly perspective known about Matthew.  
Immediately before these four parables is an instruction from Jesus –  
Keep awake therefore for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming.

Our parable for Sunday discriminates between wise and foolish bridesmaids.  
Half of them miss out on the party on account of their unpreparedness.  
Door has been shut while they are out seeking oil.  
Is this how it works?

Basic to any parable is its metaphorical quality.  
One bishop I worked with said – At some point all metaphors break down.  
But the purpose of a parable is to reveal one or more truths (meanings).  
We can say this parable discloses one thing (the importance of being ready for the Lord).  
We are to be ready even if the return of Jesus is delayed.  
According to this line of thinking the metaphor stops here.  
For example it does not indicate a message about worthiness and judgment.

Parable reflects several stereotypical features of early Christian eschatological reflection.  
Scene involves delay along with motifs of sleeping and being ready.  
Early Christians believed that Jesus' return might happen suddenly.  
Alertness was necessary.

Matthew stands out among the Gospels for its interest in a final judgment.  
Luke includes the phrase *weeping and gnashing of teeth*.  
Mark does not go there but such terminology appears in Matthew on six occasions.  
Matthew emphasized final judgment scenes more than do the other Gospels.  
In Matthew 7 Jesus warns that on that day he will reject those who practice lawlessness.  
In Matthew 25 the Son of Man divides the nations into two groups (sheep and goats).

Matthew added another distinctive element.  
One cannot discern the blessed from the damned.  
Wheat grows alongside tares and good and bad fish make their way into the net.  
Poor guest at the wedding banquet had to attend but did not know about wedding garment.  
Sheep were just as surprised by their identity and fate as did the goats.  
So . . . we may blame the foolish bridesmaids for failing to bring oil.  
But we need to remember that the bridegroom was delayed.

Parable knows only one distinction between the wise and the foolish bridesmaids.  
Five are characterized as wise because they bring extra oil.  
It renders five as foolish for failing to do so.  
Otherwise all the bridesmaids act the same.

Parable calls disciples to a state of constant alertness.  
We are to be perpetually open to what will happen next.  
We are talking about living with a keen awareness of the return of Christ.  
We are to live with an alertness tempered by preparations for the long haul.

### **Additional Thoughts**

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### **Readings for November 11**

Zephaniah 1:7 and 12-18

Psalm 90:1-8 and 12

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

Matthew 25:14-30