

2021.11.14

Scripture 1 (intro)

Scripture 1 John 7:37-38

John 7:37-38 New Revised Standard Version

Rivers of Living Water

37 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, 38 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.'"

Scripture 2 (intro)

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

Amos 1-2

New Revised Standard Version

1 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^[a] before the earthquake.

Judgment on Israel's Neighbors

2 And he 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.

Amos 5:14-15

New Revised Standard Version

14 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.

15 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.

Amos 5:21-24

New Revised Standard Version

²¹ I hate, I despise your festivals,

and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies.

²² 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.

²³ Take away from me the noise of your songs;

I will not listen to the melody of your harps.

²⁴ But let justice roll down like waters,

and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

The Word of God is among us

This is the Word of God for the People of God

Thanks be to God

CHOIR

Title: Go, Seek!

Sermon in a sentence

Amos is a good example of the people of God who study what is around them; what is going on in their world, and their time, and seek to express a 'Godly' point of view. Sometimes this is issued as a warning that comes with a demand for things to change. The pursuit of Amos's vision for God's world, as described in our lectionary verses today, present us with a working model for the activity of faithful service and discipleship in the world today as we seek to establish true justice and righteousness within humanity.

Buy In

My blog friend Steve Thompson writes about this passage: imagine a guy shows up in the pulpit today as says:

"Howdy, y'all. I'm a farmer from Alabama. The Lord told me to come here today to all you Hoosiers to give y'all a message. He says, 'I hate your worship services. I despise everything about them—your music, your offerings, your prayers. They make me sick. If you don't start getting Justice flowin' and righteousness goin', then it's lights out for you.' I guess that's it. By the way, the name's Amos."

How would you feel if that really happened right now? Would you be a little uncomfortable? Um, yes.

That's pretty much what the whole book of Amos is like.

Unpacking Scripture

Amos is the oldest book by a prophet in the Bible which makes it one of the oldest books in the Bible. Amos may seem like an unlikely prophet, he's farmer/shepherd after all. Yet he fits the description of God's prophets to a "t"! Amos message reminds us of who we are. Warns each of us of coming destruction and offers us a way out.

Amos the farmer turned prophet is called by God into service in a time after King Solomon reign over the 12 tribes of Israel has fallen apart, and the united nation is now divided into two Kingdoms. The Kingdom to the North was called Israel, was now ruled by King Jeroboam and the Kingdom to the South was called Judah, led by King Uzziah.

These kingdoms never got along, much like siblings (which they were). It could be compared to the United States like our own North/South rivalry.

The facts were clear, Israel were rolling in the money. They were able to bring tons of big offerings to God. They were following the Old Testament rules exactly as they were led out in the book of Leviticus and Numbers.

If it were a church in today's world, they would be the church with the beautiful building, an amazing music program, all kinds of cool ministries for kids and youth. The church that most people call incredibly successful. The one we little guys look up to. So, I'm guess you know which churches I am talking about.

Now Amos was a prophet from the Southern Kingdom, much less prosperous. He was a farmer, a shepherd. He was called by God to go to the Northern Kingdom to deliver this message in a scripture today

²¹ I hate, I despise your festivals, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. ²² 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. ²³ Take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your harps.

WOW, Remember the Israel is doing all the right things. They are obeying the law and worshipping God the way he told them to worship. They are observing the festivals, bringing offerings, and making beautiful music. Then this southern farmer walks into their worship service and says, "God hates this. God hates everything you're doing." We get to the heart of our text today.

So you might ask Why? What is God's problem? Doesn't God want people to worship him? Isn't that what the church is supposed to do? The clue is actually in the final verse of this scripture passage...

There is that great big **but** right there. VERSE 24 begins with **But** let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

Here it is, What God really wants is justice and righteousness. Let justice roll down like a mighty water, and righteousness flow like an ever-flowing stream.

We can gather in worship, fellowship, community, we can do all the beautiful singings, in our beautiful space and teach all the great Sunday school classes and God say to us **BUT! If we don't go and seek Justice and Righteousness we "missed the boat on being a Christ follower.**

I think our question today is what is 'justice' and 'righteousness'? How do we define them, from our Christian lenses?

Let's start with Justice – how do you define it? Here's a couple of ideas

Consequences/ Deserved Punishment

Fair/ Equal

Doing/ Acts of Giving

Now what about Righteousness? *Is this easier or harder to define?*

I believe it means 'right living'

For Amos, he wants us to live the way God intends us to.

SO WHAT!

- Do your definitions of justice hold for:
- People who have nothing?
- People who have been wrongly accused of something?
- You?
- What about righteousness?
- How do you think the rules you made up measure up to this standard?

Author John Pavlovitz wrote a book in 2017 called *A Bigger Table: Building Messy, Authentic, and Hopeful Spiritual Community*. It made a bit of a splash as he invites readers to join him on the journey to find or build a church that is big enough for everyone in the community, and by extension expand its impact on the community it serves. He speaks clearly into the heart of the issues the Christian community has been earnestly wrestling with: LGBT inclusion, gender equality, racial tensions, and global concerns.

"This book is about humanity, about the one flawed family that we belong to and the singular, odd, staggeringly beautiful story we all share. It's about trying to excavate those priceless truths from beneath the layers of far less important things that we've pile on top of them since we've been here. It's about jettisoning everything in and around us that would shrink our tables," writes Pavlovitz.ⁱ

What the Kingdom of Israel missed was it's not what is on the table but who is setted at the table. We can set a table with everything in it's place. With water goblets and desert folks all carefully arrange at each place setting, and we will have missed the opportunity of doing what God really wants: justice and righteousness of all.

As we come to the table today, remember God is inviting you to this meal to strengthen your spirit as you then go out and serve God seeking all those places where you might advocate for justice and righteousness for your brothers and sisters in Christ. Go, Seek build a larger table. AMEN

¹ <http://www.milwaukeeindependent.com/articles/moving-beyond-whats-table-building-bigger-table/>