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Message for June 13, 2021
“Majoring in the Minors: Justice”
Speaker: Pastor Tom Grieb
Scripture: Amos 5:18-24

The Prophet’s Role

We find ourselves near the start of a sermon series focusing on the Minor Prophets. As we have said, there is nothing minor about the Minor Prophets.

When you think about prophesy, what comes to mind? Most people think that prophesy has to do with predicting the future. There is no doubt that what God has in store plays a huge role in the prophetic.

I have come to know though, that prophesy is not so much about *foretelling* the future, as it is *forthtelling* the will of God.

Prophets are more likely to talk about things like injustice and hypocrisy. Prophets are all about calling a spade a spade when it comes to such things, particularly when such things are done in the name of religion.

Eugene Peterson has this to say about such things, “*Prophets see right through hypocrisy that assumes a religious pose. They sniff out injustice especially injustice dressed up in religious garb.*”

We hear from one of those prophets today. The Prophet Amos spoke a challenging word centuries ago that continues to resound to this day. His word is just as timely today as it was when he first spoke it. Let’s turn then to Amos 5:18-24 and hear a challenging word about justice.

Amos 5:18-24

*Woe to you who long
for the day of the LORD!
Why do you long for the day of the LORD?
That day will be darkness, not light.
It will be as though a man fled from a lion
only to meet a bear,
as though he entered his house
and rested his hand on the wall
only to have a snake bite him. Will not the day of the LORD be darkness, not light—
pitch-dark, without a ray of brightness?
“I hate, I despise your religious festivals;
your assemblies are a stench to me.*

*Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings,
I will not accept them.
Though you bring choice fellowship offerings,
I will have no regard for them.
Away with the noise of your songs!
I will not listen to the music of your harps.
But let justice roll on like a river,
righteousness like a never-failing stream!*

Amos

Amos, just like Hosea, prophesied during the 8th century B.C. Amos was a simple man who packed a powerful punch.

Amos was a shepherd. He also tended fig trees. Amos hailed from Tekoa, which was a small town about six miles south of Bethlehem, which meant he wasn't far from Jerusalem. Amos was from the Southern Kingdom of Judah. His prophecies, though, were directed to those in the Northern Kingdom of Israel.

Amos had little regard for those in positions of power. He was not at all impressed by them, much less swayed by their place of authority. Amos knew his authority came from God.

Amos would have agreed with the old adage, *"Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely."* Amos was a defender of the downtrodden. His heart was with the poor and dispossessed. Amos knew the powerful treated them unjustly, some while hiding behind religion.

Held Accountable

Amos was all about holding people accountable. The first couple of chapters of the Book of Amos contain a series of oracles that pronounce God's judgement on the nations that surrounded Israel. Those judgements were quite severe.

Eventually, Amos got around to talking about Israel, and in so doing didn't pull any punches. In a word, Israel had lost its way. They kept the trappings of religion without living them out. They were more into ease and comfort than they were trying to help those whose lives were anything but comfortable.

They denied justice to the oppressed and sustenance to the poor. They thought nothing of selling a person for a pair of shoes if it meant getting ahead. In a word, they didn't measure up.

In Amos 7:7, the prophet uses an image of a plumb line to make his point. You know what a plumb line does. It has a way of telling whether things are in line.

Our son, John, was given a plumb line while he was in high school by a very dear friend of ours. With the gift came the encouragement to live a life that is straight and true.

"This is what the Lord showed me," says Amos in Amos 7:7-8. *"The Lord was standing by a wall that had been built true to plumb, with a plumb line in his hand. And the Lord asked me, 'What do you see, Amos?'"*

'A plumb line,' I replied.

Then the Lord said, 'Look, I am setting a plumb line among my people Israel; I will spare them no longer.'"

That plumb line is still extended, and I fear we too fail to measure up. We fall short in so many ways. We too are all about tending to our own needs at the expense of the needs of others. We are apt to figure we have it all together spiritually when the fruit we bear says otherwise. We are just like those of Israel of old when it comes to being just.

Let's face it, when it comes to justice, if we don't live justly, who will? There are far too many who are getting the short sheet while we live far more comfortably than we deserve.

When it comes to living justly, how do you measure up?

Looking at Ourselves in the Mirror

The prophets have a way of holding a mirror in front of us, forcing us to take a good look at ourselves. The prophet Amos is no exception. It is not always easy taking a good look at ourselves. We often don't like what we see, particularly when the light of the Lord is involved.

I am always challenged by what Paul writes in I Corinthians 13:12, *"Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known."* (I Corinthians 13:12)

That verse is a part of Paul's great chapter on love known as *The Love Chapter*. The love we share is only a poor reflection of the love God bestows upon our lives. In God's light though, love is perfected, and we are able to reach out as God desires, particularly to the least and last of this world.

Challenged to Respond

Amos was one of those Minor Prophets who engages us in a major way. Amos forces us to consider our dealings with the poor. He puts us on notice about the injustices we promote, sometimes unwittingly.

Amos challenges us about self-righteousness, a self-righteousness that has a way of creeping in when we figure we have it all together when truth be told, we really don't.

Amos, like all the other prophets we will be studying this summer, causes us to think, and not just think, but look deep within. In the end, we are challenged to respond.

Skye Jethani in his book, *What If Jesus Was Serious?* says this:

Orthodoxy (Right Belief) – Orthopraxy (Right Behavior) = Hypocrisy
Orthodoxy (Right Belief) + Orthopraxy (Right Behavior) = Christianity

How is that sort of thing playing out in your life?

Amos has this to say about that,

“Let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!” (Amos 5:24)

Eugene Peterson in his paraphrase of this passage puts things this way,

“I can’t stand your religious meetings. I am fed up with your conferences and conventions. I want nothing to do with your religious projects, your pretentious slogans and goals.

I’m sick of your fund-raising schemes, your public relations and image making.

I have had all I can take of your noisy ego-music. When was the last time you sang to me?

*Do you know what I want? I want justice—oceans of it. I want fairness—rivers of it. That’s all I want. That **ALL** I want.” (Amos 5:21-24 *The Message*)*

All I could do when I read that was say, “Wow.” And then pray for God’s forgiveness for my lack of engagement in the things that really matter.

Let Justice Roll Down

If we are not heeding the call of the prophet to promote justice, then, quite frankly, we are falling short of where God wants us to be.

Justice has everything to do with making things right—educationally, economically, racially, and relationally.

Those of us who have given our lives to Jesus are *justified* in his sight. We are made right, even though we don’t deserve it.

If that’s the case, you would think that the *justified* would then work to make things right for others, that working for justice would be front and center in what they’re about.

“Oh God, well up within in us and let justice roll on like a river.”

We have read this week that the drought is so bad out west that the water levels approaching Hoover Dam are at record lows and are still falling. Without water there is no power.

God provides what is necessary for *“justice to roll on like a river.”*

Because he loves us, we are able then to love other people. Because he is taking care of our ever need, we find ourselves wanting take care of the needs of others. Because God’s grace has welled up deep within us, making us right with him, we can do no other but see that things are right with others as well.

“Let justice then roll on like a river and righteousness like a never-failing stream!”