

Picture of Prophet Timeline

From this Sunday through the 3rd week in Advent we are going to take a journey through the prophets. Amos is the first and the oldest prophet found in the Old Testament. As we look at each prophet it is helpful to ask a questions first. Which nation is the prophet speaking to? At this time the Jewish Nation is divided because of a civil war. Yes, you can think of it as North versus South. The Northern Kingdom is called Israel which consisted of the 10 tribes. The Southern Kingdom was called Judah which consisted of Judah and the tribe of Benjamin. Most prophets spoke to one kingdom over another, but some spoke to both. So what can we say about Amos? We read in Amos 1:1

“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 Isral, two years before the earthquake”.

Amos is a shepherd. He is one of the people. He is poor. He is the lowest on the economic totem pole. He is not a learned scholar. He is just an ordinary person who understands the something is wrong in the world. Secondly, we learn that he is from Tekoa which is in the Southern Kingdom, Judah. But his words will be addressed in the Northern Kingdom and others. So we read what is happening in the Northern Kingdom. These words are hard words to hear. We read in Amos 2:6-8

⁶ Thus says the LORD:

**For three transgressions of Israel,
and for four, I will not revoke the punishment;
because they sell the righteous for silver,
and the needy for a pair of sandals—**

**⁷ they who trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth,
and push the afflicted out of the way;
father and son go in to the same girl,
so that my holy name is profaned;**

**⁸ they lay themselves down beside every altar
on garments taken in pledge;
and in the house of their God they drink
wine bought with fines they imposed.**

Please understand, that these words are addressed to people in power. It is the elite, the wealthy, and the ones in control who are doing what they please. Selling the righteous for silver is a reference to putting your own people into slavery. The needy get sold for sandals. They trample the head of the poor. The push the afflicted out of the way. Father and Son are involved in prostitution, so women are treated badly. If

you take a garment in pledge from a poor person, you are supposed to return it at night because that is their blanket. Instead they are sleeping on these blankets. Lastly they drink wine in their house of God bought with fines.

Surprise! Surprise! God does not approve! Amos says this is contrary to God's will for the world. So Amos says that God wants them to seek God and not evil that you may live. And then we have perhaps Amos's most famous verse in Amos 5:24

“But let Justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream”

A seminary professor I knew received his PHD at a Jewish seminary. It is pretty cool having a Christian learn from Jewish scholars. A Jewish scholar said this about Amos,

“If you like Amos, than you don't really understand the book”

Picture of Prophet

Amos is supposed to be disturbing. At seminary I was told in a class that ever so often pastors have to be prophets. Do you know what happens to prophets. They get stoned. Now if you want to throw things at me, my hope that it is marshmallows. One of the roles of pastors often cited is this: Pastors are to:

Comfort the Afflicted Afflict the Comforted

I am going to leave it up to you to decide which one of these you are this morning.

Now when we hear the words justice and righteousness all of us think we know what that means. It means caring for the poor and having empathy for those far from God. That is true. But the reality is that for most of us, we are far removed from those that face injustice. Imagine if you will if a farmer from Northern Mexico, came across the border and began to tell us Americans what we were doing wrong. This person would point out how we have failed to take care of the poor and the needy. Do you know what our reaction would be? Who are you to tell us what to do? What gives you the right?

This is what Amos will go through. As a shepherd, he is seeing things from his and God's perspective. You may not realize what you are doing Amos declares. God's way is a way of life. So if you want to live God's way, than all people matter to God. And if all people matter to God, than every person counts. Every person is important.

What I have learned is that justice and righteousness mostly is a matter of perspective. My dad's education went to 8th grade but he was street smart. One main objective he had for his children was all four of us would have college degrees. We were lower middle class but my family made sure the kids went to college. So I have the benefit of a good education. Education isn't everything, but it does allow you to have a greater chance of economic prosperity. So imagine then if you were raised where education isn't a priority. High school dropouts leads to more high school dropouts. Imagine if

your home life is disruptive. Imagine you are born into poverty. Imagine that the color of your skin is not white. Imagine how hard it is to begin life with many strikes against you. It is no wonder that the poor end up in prison and on the streets.

So Justice and Righteousness means we constantly look for ways to improve our world. If water is life giving, than we as a church are to be living water people. It begins with a willingness to open our souls to the needs of the world. It begins with an honesty about how lucky we have it. It begins when we see others, the way Jesus sees the, beloved, worthwhile, children of God. It also begins when you decide to not throw marshmallows at your pastor. Amen.