

The book of Amos was once just something I had to read for a course I needed to pass. I had chosen Hebrew as my language option, and that meant a course that required me to put my (limited) Hebrew skills to the test. Study, translate and interpret – that was the course outline. Now, I am no Hebrew scholar - I'm just interested in language; and I'm no Old Testament expert – but I am keen to bring all of Scripture to bear on this life of faith we are sharing. The Scriptures we recognize as the 'old' Testament are an early revelation of the work of God among the Hebrew people. These are the Scriptures of Jesus and his disciples. These are the words and ideas (and controversies) that help us towards a fuller understanding of God. So gradually during my studies (and since) I have become more and more convinced that we need what these ancient texts have to offer.

And that includes Amos; especially Amos.

Amos is among those who were called to speak God's wisdom, knowledge, and presence into a time of crisis. But in Amos' day, the crisis was internal. Amos lives in a (relatively) peaceful time, between significant foreign invasions. The crisis was complacency.

The leaders were convinced that their ease (and their power) was due to their religious devotion. They must be doing something right – God must really favour them etc. etc. etc. But they had also done what powerful people are prone to doing – they twisted their religious feelings into less than flattering applications. They liked giving God (some) credit for the good times - especially when it was politically expedient - but they LOVED all the benefits, the privilege and the power afforded them by those good times. They claimed the title "God's chosen" but were putting that title to poor use.

The poor still suffered – justice was still perverted – that was just the way things were; a problem too big to be considered.

The thing about the book of Amos is that these nearly 3000 year old words start to sound very current if you read them in today's religiously slanted political environment.

'Good' Christian people (in Canada too) line up to support politicians who spout fear-filled rhetoric about the good old days – and who propose platforms designed to keep power (and comfort) the domain of (mostly) straight-white-Christian folk (yes, still talking about Canadian Politics.) And because the 'good Christian support' includes people we know and love, we are hard-pressed to have anything like a reasonable conversation about the choices that are being made – and the harm that continues to be done.

To stand under a party banner or a national flag as say 'God is with us' is a dangerous misappropriation of the Holy One.

Maybe it's a fight about medical assistance in dying, or an argument in favour of outlawing conversion therapy for LGBTQI people, or immigration, or ...well, just pick your topic - they're all difficult to talk about to begin with, but when the conversation includes someone who has married religious conviction to political convenience, then it's damn near impossible. Yet Amos - especially Amos - is still urging us to have those conversations:

Festivals for the sake of festivals - praise that has human ego at its centre - powerful people who imagine that 'righteousness' means saying things that religious people want to hear...it was a travesty then; it's a travesty now.

God cries out for justice - God rages with the oppressed against their oppressors - God exhibits a preferential option for the poor - whatever the prosperity preachers may say.

Amos begs his people to see the truth. It's not that their religious impulses are bad, it that they have not applied those impulses to their political allegiances. The 'pro-life/pro-family' politician may be appealing because you imagine that God is pro life and pro family; good start, but are you sure you know how God defines life or what God would call a family?

Jesus grew up with the prophets as his religious conscience, and with a wider sense of who God is that any human before or since - and Jesus had something to say about family and life. The life Jesus describes (and offers) is abundant life, without the fragile human boundaries of birth and death that we impose. Jesus called all manner of people 'children of God', stretching the definition of family beyond its usual limit.

We here at St John's declare that our mission is to glorify God by living the love of Jesus Christ day by day. That means our job as people of faith is to follow Jesus seeking God's glory guided by God's love. Seems simple, but it means measuring everything - especially those things that seem to align Divine will with human policy - by asking 'does this plan, this policy, this posture exhibit the love that Jesus demonstrated?'

Every. Single. Time.

Immigration policy. Education policy. Health care. Energy. Ask this question of every statement that comes from a Prime Minister, a Premier, an MLA or MP -all the way down to school board officials or the president of the neighbourhood association.

Don't misunderstand me - it is not necessary that any of these people are followers of Jesus (in fact, it might be better if they were not) - but if **WE** would be followers of Jesus, we need to ask questions that demand love be shown and justice roll like a persistent stream.

This justice - the justice God demands/prefers - is not the property of 'the winners' to be imposed on 'the losers.' God's justice seeks a universal application of the principles of love and compassion. God's justice demands humility and equity. God's justice is not ours to dispense, but it can be ours to experience in the life death and resurrection of Jesus.

Here we see justice that confounds the (so called) ruling power of the day - justice that defies human expectations of life and death - of crime and punishment - of 'winner and loser.'

In Jesus the Roman symbol of intimidation (the cross) becomes humanity's reminder of God's ultimate power. Roman 'justice' concerned ultimate punishment. God's justice offers abundant life.

So stay involved - stay concerned - get involved; but let us follow Jesus in our desire for justice - for peace - for love - for God's glory.