

## **Message for Remembrance Sunday**

**November 7, 2021**

**Amos 5:18-24**

**Luke 12:41-44**

“When the prophet Amos walked down the main drag, it was like a shoot-out in the Old West. Everybody ran for cover. His special target was The Beautiful People, and shooting from the hip, he never missed his mark. He pictures them sleek and tanned at Palm Beach, Acapulco, St. Tropez. They glisten with suntan lotion. The stereo is piped out over the marble terrace. Another tray of Bloody Marys is on the way.

With one eye cocked on them, he has his other cocked on the Unbeautiful People – the varicose veins of the old waiter, the pasty face of the starch-fed child, the winos passed out on the railroad siding, the ragged woman fumbling for food stamps at the check-out counter.

When justice is finally done, Amos says, there will be Hell to pay. The Happy Hour will be postponed indefinitely. Nothing but a few chicken bones will mark the place where the cold buffet was spread out under the royal palms.”

So wrote Frederick Buechner in his book “Peculiar Treasures: A Biblical Who’s Who”. Buechner is an American Presbyterian minister and one of my favorite authors, and even though I realize that his writing style doesn’t appeal to everyone, he does give us a good idea of what the prophet Amos was like. As Buechner suggests, Amos was a very angry man who called it the way he saw it. But why was Amos, who lived about 750 years before Jesus, so very angry? A historian named Stephen Winward tell us:

“In former times the peasants had been the strength of the nation. Now, in the changed circumstances following upheavals and wars, they were at the mercy of the rich and their small holdings had been swallowed up in the large estates. There was a gulf between the rich and poor. Nor was there any redress for the oppressed in the law courts, for the judges accepted bribes from

the rich, and those without money were given no chance of a hearing. Not that the powerful and wealthy were irreligious! The sanctuaries were thronged with worshippers, offering many costly gifts and sacrifices. Piety and devotion went hand in hand with injustice and oppression. Religion was divorced from justice, piety from kindness, sacrifice from mercy. Such was the state of the nation when Amos was sent to preach.”

Given all this, is it any surprise that Amos was an angry man? He was infuriated by the gulf between the way things should have been and the way things really were. Amos’ anger certainly comes across in today’s first scripture passage. In it he attacked the rich people’s hypocrisy saying that they thought that they were so good and religious but look at how they treated the less fortunate! And since their religion was divorced from their day-to-day lives, God took no delight in their worship and sacrifices. Worship and offerings were all fine and good said Amos, but in themselves they were not good enough. They weren’t because while God wanted his people to worship him, he also wanted them to put their faith into action by caring for and respecting one another. In short said Amos, God wanted justice to roll on like a river and righteousness like an everlasting stream.

This said Amos, is what God wants from us his people and who could disagree with him? This I am sure is what we want too; all of us, in theory at least, are in favour of justice and righteousness. But is this the reality though? So often we are all in favour of justice and righteousness, at least until it begins to cost us or poses an inconvenience to our lifestyle or our pocketbooks. Then it can be a different matter altogether. We can think of climate change for example.

Nobody is in favour of global warming and many, indeed probably most people, agree that we cannot keep on going the way we are. Something must be done to stop, or at the very least, slow down the earth’s rising temperature for both our sakes and that of the generations yet to come. Indeed if we do nothing then what sort of world are we leaving to our children and grandchildren? To do something is a matter of justice and righteousness and this of course is what the conference now being held in Glasgow is all about. But while poll after poll shows that the vast majority of people by far agree that there is a problem and that something ought to be done about it, poll after poll

also shows that most people are neither willing to pay to fix things nor willing to experience any real inconvenience to their lifestyle either. In a manner of speaking, we want to have it both ways, but we can't. We can't because justice and righteousness almost always come with a price and that in fact is what both today and next Thursday are all about; the sacrifices demanded and made so that justice and righteousness might flow.

Today and in the coming days leading up to and including Remembrance Day, we remember the conflicts of days gone by such as World War One, World War Two and Korea. Today we also remember more recent conflicts and peacekeeping missions as well such as in the Balkans and Afghanistan. Today though we do not just remember history, we also remember the ideals that motivated people to make the sacrifices that they did.

Imagine for a moment what the world would be like today if Europe had ended up being dominated by or even ruled by the Kaiser and Imperial Germany. Or imagine what Europe and the very world itself would be like if Hitler and the Nazis had prevailed; the concentration camps with the mass extermination of the Jews, gays and others, as well as the inhumane medical experiments and the notion that people exist to serve the state rather than the other way around. Or imagine what would have happened to the people of South Korea if they had been forced against their will into the North, that paranoid dictatorship where people live with the constant threat of hunger and lack even the most basic freedoms. Or imagine what would have happened in the Balkans without the military intervention of NATO putting a stop to the genocide that was taking place. Or to use a more recent example, we can think of Afghanistan since the departure of the NATO forces and the resulting takeover by the Taliban. In many ways that country is returning to what we would call, 'The Dark Ages'.

Now all of this is not for one moment to glorify war and conflict. Indeed resorting to war and violence reflects a total failure in diplomacy and good will. Tragically though, we live in a broken and less than perfect world where sometimes, when all else fails, we the people of peace however reluctantly, must resort to force. But when we do so, it is so that justice and righteousness might flow. We remember that on this Remembrance Sunday but we also remember something else as well and that is that justice and righteousness almost always has a price, and that that price can be heartbreakingly high.

Ten years ago I officiated at a wedding and the groom was a reservist with the Toronto Scottish Regiment. He had recently returned from his tour of duty in Afghanistan. When I first met the couple, we were supposed to be discussing their upcoming wedding service and marriage in general. That however wasn't what was first and foremost on the groom's mind. All he wanted to do was talk about what he had seen and experienced while over in Afghanistan. While haunted by his experience though, he still firmly believed that volunteering and going there had been the right thing to do.

"That justice and righteousness might flow like an everlasting stream". This, said Amos, is what God desires in this world but tragically as we all know, sometimes the price paid for this to happen is heartbreakingly high. Truly as a person once said, behind every name etched on every cenotaph is a person who loved and was loved.

Today we remember this; we remember those who paid the price so that justice and righteousness might flow. Today and next Thursday however we should also stop and ask ourselves what sacrifices we are prepared to make and what price we are willing to pay so that this might happen. Could we, or would we even, ever be like the old woman in today's second scripture passage who, in giving her two cents, sacrificed everything she had for what she believed in?

### **Pastoral Prayer**

God of all power and love, on this Remembrance Sunday we pray for your blessing upon our nation. Give wisdom and strength to the Queen and govern we pray, those who govern us.

We pray for your blessing upon all the members of our armed forces. Defend them in times of danger and grant that they may serve the cause of justice and peace.

We pray for your blessing upon our young people and grant that they may never see the flames of war or know the depth of cruelty to which men and women can descend.

On this day of remembrance, we pray for all who have or still are suffering from the effects of war and conflict. We pray for the wounded of mind, body, and soul. We pray for those whose faith in you and others has been shaken by the things that they have seen, witnessed, and endured. Comfort all who mourn and those who miss loved ones and friends.

We pray this day for all who are homeless, those who are refugees, those who are hungry and those who have lost their livelihoods and a sense of security. Help us we pray, to make this world a better place through our being a part of it.

We pray this day for all in positions of authority in every land and give them the wisdom to do what is right. Encourage those who work for peace, and those who strive to improve the lives of others who lack so much including the very necessities of life.

We pray for your Church throughout the world, and we pray that we who bear your Son's name may truly be instruments of your will, bringing peace to our homes, our nation, and the world beyond.

And now, rejoicing in the communion of saints, we remember those whom we love whom you have gathered into the peace of your presence. We give you thanks for those whom we have known and loved, whose memory we treasure in our hearts forever. Grant that at the last, we with them, may receive the crown of life that never fades. Through Jesus Christ our Lord we pray, Amen