

“Meet Amos”
Amos 7:7-17; 8:1-12 *CEV*

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From what we’ve read in the book of Amos it sounds like Amos was content with his life as a farmer – caring for his sheep and fig trees. And we learned that Amos never trained to be a prophet, had no desire to be a prophet, yet the LORD called him to leave his farm to deliver some hard messages to the people of Israel, including King Jeroboam and Amaziah the priest at Bethel. And if anyone didn’t like what Amos had to preach about, that was just too bad. They could take it up with God, because Amos was only doing what God wanted him to do, and even King Jeroboam and Amaziah the priest weren’t going to stop him or stand in his way. (I get the impression that Amos thinks the sooner he can deliver the prophetic message, the sooner he can get back to his farm.)

We are getting to know just a little bit about Amos through our reading of chapters seven and eight. But there are six other chapters before what we read, and another one after, so clearly Amos had MORE that he shared from the LORD. And most of it sounds pretty harsh, but that’s understandable because God is holding God’s people accountable for oppressing the poor, crushing the needy, and being greedy cheats who have turned away from God in their hearts and in their daily lives. They watch the clock for the Sabbath to be over, so they can get back to work tipping the scales in their favor. If God is going to call folks out for stuff like that, don’t you think it should sound harsh? For example back in chapter five Amos gave the people of Israel a glimpse of God’s view of their worship practices as he spoke for God:

*I hate, I despise your festivals, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies.
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.
Take away from me the noise of your songs;
I will not listen to the melody of your harps.
But let justice roll down like waters,
and righteousness like an everflowing stream. – Amos 5:21-24 NRSV*

God’s flood of righteousness is going to sweep away the mess the people have made of their lives. God demands justice and integrity from a people who have only been going through the motions of worshiping God, without living lives that honor God. And God gets all ‘judgey’ on them. Which makes us nervous, doesn’t it? We would like God to forgive and forget anything wrong we might do, and not judge us or place a judgement on us. And yet – WE are still pretty quick to judge other people aren’t we? We don’t hesitate to make our own judgements: “I am so done with you;” “You’re the worst!;” “Lock him up and throw away the key!;” “You should really suffer for what you did.” Most of our judgements have to do with anger, or feeling hurt or slighted; and reflect how we want to lash out, or get back at, or punish someone. So, no, we do not want to think that God

would act like us: to judge us in anger, in order to punish us. But what we don't seem to understand is that God doesn't approach judgement the way we do.

The judgements of God are part of the graciousness of God. God's judgement names what is out of alignment in behavior and actions, in order to seek re-alignment and justice, to set things right. The people of God can't do whatever the heck we want to because we think we have a lock on being "God's people" no matter what. So God's judgement is a reminder that if we want to continue to be "God's people" we need to reflect the basic qualities of God in our own lives. Who we are needs to mirror God's justice, love, mercy, and compassion – rather than the 'dog eat dog' values of the world around us. God calls us to be just. The world tells us, "Just do it! And if you can make money on it, it doesn't matter who you hurt along the way." God calls us to love our neighbor. The world tells us, "It's every man for himself." God calls us to be merciful. The world tells us, "Don't get even, get revenge." God calls us to be compassionate. The world tells us, "Don't be a chump!" . . . There is a clear gap between God's plumb line of life and the death dealing ways of the world. God's judgement is that we need to die to our worldly sin to be reborn to new and eternal life. Right here and now.

When Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. addressed the Young Men's and Women's Christian Associations (that would be the YMCA and YWCA) at the University of California at Berkley on June 4, 1957, he concluded his remarks by saying:

Modern psychology has a word that is probably used more than any other word. It is the word "maladjusted." Now we all should seek to live a well adjusted life in order to avoid neurotic and schizophrenic personalities. But there are some things within our social order to which I am proud to be maladjusted and to which I call upon you to be maladjusted. I never intend to adjust myself to segregation and discrimination. I never intend to adjust myself to mob rule. I never intend to adjust myself to the tragic effects of the methods of physical violence and to tragic militarism. I call upon you to be maladjusted to such things. I call upon you to be as maladjusted as Amos who in the midst of the injustices of his day cried out in words that echo across the generations, "Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream." As maladjusted as Abraham Lincoln who had the vision to see that this nation could not exist half slave and half free. As maladjusted as Jefferson, who in the midst of an age amazingly adjusted to slavery could cry out, "All men are created equal and are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights and that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." As maladjusted as Jesus of Nazareth who dreamed a dream of the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. God grant that we will be so maladjusted that we will be able to go out and change our world and our civilization. And then we will be able to move from the bleak and desolate midnight of man's inhumanity to man to the bright and glittering daybreak of freedom and justice.

(pp 14-15, A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr., edited by James M. Washington; HarperCollins Publishers)

What was true about injustice in 1957, and in Amos' time, is also true today. There are still too many people living in need. Too many people whose voices are unheard or ignored. Too many people who are being killed because of the color of their uniform or the color of their skin. We cannot sit by and grow used to this. God calls us to stand up and be heard. To stand up and work for change. To work for justice and peace. To be God's people. To be maladjusted to the world as it is, so that God's kingdom can come on earth as it is in heaven.

Amen.