



"Let Justice Roll"

23rd Sunday after Pentecost
Saturday and Sunday, November 11 and 12, 2017

All Services
The Reverend Dr. Jack M. Horner, Jr.
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church
Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

Amos 5:18-24; Psalm 70;
1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Matthew 25:1-13

Grace and peace be to you from our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

What makes you mad? What makes you mad? Do you know what makes me mad, self-check-out machines? Where does the card go, which button am I supposed to push, is it the red X or the green circle, and then half the time I get this message that says, go see *the attendant*, which is really what I wanted to do from the very beginning.

What makes you mad?

There was a survey that was done of what make people angry, the top three were being blamed for something I didn't do. The second one was other people taking credit for what I did do, and the third was, too many coffee choices at Starbucks. Boy, doesn't that make you angry!

What do you think though makes God mad, really mad? Now of course we all know about the Ten Commandments, elevating other things to more importance than God, attentiveness to worship, killing or perhaps not even helping your neighbor, disrespecting elders and those in authority, talking about people behind their back, unfaithfulness in relationships between God or between other people, self-centeredness and greed. God gets angry when his covenant is broken and when we ignore his commands, when we don't care for the people who have been made in his Divine image.

More than 2,700 years ago the Prophet Amos gave a voice to God's righteous anger. At the time the United Kingdom of David and Solomon had been broken up and divided into two separate Jewish kingdoms. In the North was Israel and the South Judea. But both of those countries were experiencing a spiritual malaise. They had forgotten who they were and where they came from and to whom they were accountable. There were financial indiscretions, there was bribery, the poor were being cheated out of their property and livelihood. There were political shenanigans making bad alliances with natural enemies of the Jewish people and there was social corruption, just people misbehaving in all sorts of ways.

Amos promises that neither Israel nor Judea will escape the Divine wrath. God is mad. And so, Amos gives voice to God's righteous anger. After all the people should have known better, they had the law, the Commandments. The behaviors were all spelled out as to how they were to act both with God and with each other, to be people of empathy, loyalty, generosity and compassion. And they also had the occasional prophetic voice like Amos calling people to faithfulness. God's justice and holy peace. In shocking fashion, Amos declares God's disgust with them. *"I hate, I despise your festivals, I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings. I will*

not accept them: the offerings of your well-being of you 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 the like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream." God detests their worship, their solemn festivals, their sacrifices, even their music.

Why is that? Were they doing it wrong? Were they singing too many old Methodist hymns? Were they not following the correct procedures and rubrics of following the liturgy the proper way? No. The festivals and the prayers were being properly offered, but the problem was that the change of life that was proclaimed in their worship never made it outside of the temple and the synagogue. They were different people when they were worshiping than the people they should have become when they left worship. They confessed, they sought change and redemption and new life in their worship inside, but they didn't make it outside. Their religious rituals were devoid of righteousness and the justice that was demanded by their God.

God said to them, feed the hungry, they would feed the hungry. God said care for the stranger, they were to care for the stranger. God said love your neighbor, they were to love their neighbor, all of them without exception. That's the essence of the justice that Amos declares. The justice implies an obligation both to God as well as to others who are made in the image of God. And in justice, at its heart is a fundamental breakdown of community, a lack of caring for people. This happens when we judge others, when we second guess motives, when we look down on those who are different from us, when we condemn before we have all of the facts. When that happens, it leads to injustice and the breaking of God's Shalom, his Holy Peace, systemic poverty, hunger, bullying, child abuse, racism, hatred, bigotry, oppression, war, violence, terrorism. It stirs God's righteous anger and calls the people of God to holy action. God's justice is for all of us or it's for none of us, and yet we all fall short.

We will all surely be judged by God, not by others. True justice however lies in proving our future, in correcting past wrongs, in seeking forgiveness, reconciliation and righteousness, that living in a right relationship with both God and with our neighbor.

During the civil rights movement in the 1960's Martin Luther King, Jr. understood God's desire for justice and for righteousness. In his speech that he gave at the Lincoln Memorial in 1963 the famous "I Have a Dream" speech, he paraphrased the Prophet Amos: *"No, no," he said. "We are not satisfied, and we will not be satisfied until justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream."*

Without justice and righteousness, you and I are in darkness. We think that we can do whatever we want it means liberation and freedom, but ultimately it just leads to despair. It leads to meaninglessness where there is no right or wrong, or caring or sharing, serving or lifting up. Ultimately it just brings us to hopelessness and then inhumanity against each other. Justice and righteousness, Amos says, are like water. They nourish us, they give us life, they bring healing and they transform individuals as well as nations.

Our Christian life that we share is practicing God's love and God's demands every single day with joy and delight. Like the bridesmaids who were prepared to receive their master, it's having light ready to share with the world and to light the way for others. We are not satisfied, let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. Amen.

In the name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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