

**Sermon notes:** Sept 25, 2022

**Focus:** Book of Amos and the prophet's focus on economic justice [Lectionary Readings](#)

In the sermon, I won't give you "how to's" for social change but offer Amos as an admirable agitator for good. I want to give you a biblical example of a normal guy provoked to speak out for the poor. If you read the book of Amos and find him relatable and likeable, please see me, we need to talk. He is important, but a little like sandpaper.

The Bible testifies about Amos who is a real-world example of a worker turned into a social critic. Through his visions and his experiences in the marketplaces, he got loud quickly. His radicalism is not *that* radical. His abiding conviction is that both rich and poor have equal footing with God. For him, any deviation from this basic principle would bring the wrath of God and the overthrow of the Northern Kingdom.

**Quick note:** There used to be the United Monarchy led by Saul, David, Solomon and his son Rehoboam ((the last United Monarch) the whole period is 1047 BCE to 930 BCE). After Rehoboam, the Hebrews split into two kingdoms: Southern Judah and Northern Israel.

Amos lived in the Southern Kingdom but did business in the North. He was a redneck arborist and shepherd from Tekoa (The South). To make money, he went to the towns and villages of the North to ply his goods. Amos developed a habit of yelling at the wealthy Northerners. He believed that God was going punish their nation for violating the principle of equal justice.

On his journeys, he observed the hardships on the working class, while the rich complained about keeping up their second and third homes. The rich people's self-justification of exploitation agitated Amos. The clergy were little better. They sucked up to the rich and insisted that God had to bless them because they worshiped in the right and prettiest way.

Both clergy and the rich reasoned that poor people deserved their hard lot in life because they do not worship or think correctly. Amos understood that a people's worship of God was more connected to a just society, than the right flavor of incense in church.

**Visions** Amos had visions.

- *Man with a plumb line measures a bulging wall that is about to fall* - The bulging wall is the house of Israel (North) teetering on collapse.
- *A basket of summer fruit* - The fruit represents those whose overripe wealth is already decaying. The peaceful years of the Israel are soon over.
- *Locusts* - Evil days lie ahead where bugs will consume everything.
- *Fire* - Sea and Land will be scorched.
- *Altar* - Religious buildings would be flattened.

Inspired by godly visions, Amos goes to the Bethel sanctuary (think big deal northern church); he declares that Yahweh hates, despises their parties and religious ceremonies. Amos believes he was the mouthpiece of God. He was a little less tribal than the culture he lived in because he believed that Yahweh was not a regional deity mainly for the Hebrews, but a God over all. Therefore, justice is universal.

**Day of the Lord** *What happens in Bethel stays in Bethel* would never work for Amos. The Day of the Lord is a theme in the Old Testament. The theme is usually about rejoicing that God is coming to help Israel. This was the exact opposite for Amos. The Day of the Lord will NOT be a victory but defeat, because God does not favor fat bank accounts.

**Did Jesus give the privileged a pass?** Jesus says we will always have the poor with us, but he did not tell us to make the poor poorer just because we can. There are current practices that need a few Amos style challenges to create a better world. Jesus and Amos are alike when it came to money and how it can be corrupting. When Jesus saw the moneychangers exploiting religious pilgrims, he flipped the tables. When wealthy men slept with low standing women, the men dragged a woman out to be stoned, and tried to shame Jesus too. Jesus did not hesitate to indict them by scribbling their names in the sand which made them walk away one-by-one.

**For Profit Colleges** I am lucky to have the resources not to send my soon-to-be high school graduates to a For Profit College, I won't name these institutions, but you can easily figure out who they are. FPC's were started to fill a niche for poorer people to have a degree that was previously unavailable to them, even at the regular Junior College level.

Yet, FPC's have a horrible history of indebting people for life. At core they are a marketing and technology outfit intent on selling success dreams to people who are hurting. FPC management instructs telemarketers to find the person's "pain point" and then sell a useless degree to them as the solution.

If you know a young person or single parent, warn them to be massively cautious about jumping into the for-profit ecosystem. I dated a girl decades ago, who enrolled in a for profit school and still has debt, a worthless degree, and the same employment options she had as when she started.

**Dollar stores** If you find yourself in a poor community, count the number of Dollar Trees, Dollar Generals, and Everything's a Dollars within a mile of each other. They are extremely profitable but can destroy the fragile, financial ecosystem in small towns.

Through scale, they can crush regular grocery stores. You might say "yea, free market," which would be fine except for the food scarcity they leave behind after the regular grocery store closes. Their presence in Dublin and Concord is not a big deal, but it is destabilizing to small, poor America. Don't shop Dollar-whatever in small town America if you can help it.

I offer these thoughts not to get you to feel guilty, but to be curious how God might be stoking the spirit of Amos in you. Amos looked around in the markets where he worked and got incredibly involved in advocating for the poor. He also tackled systems that created unnecessary suffering. His laments are recorded in the Book of Amos: "They sell the innocent for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals. They trample on the heads of the poor as on the dust of the ground and deny justice to the oppressed." Jesus also could not stand the powerful breaking people just because they were vulnerable.

Let us be a little like the prophets - open to dreams and visions. Let us also be prepared for the Holy Spirit to ask to do something for the sake of the poor. We do not have to wonder. When God calls for justice, it will be with the subtlety of Jesus with a bullhorn. **Todd**