

Listening for the Promise

WEEKLY DEVOTIONAL

Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 21) – September 25, 2022

“Woe to those who lie on beds of ivory...who drink wine in bowls and anoint themselves with the finest oils, but are not grieved over the ruin of Joseph!”

– Amos 6:4a, 6–

God called Amos, a shepherd living in the southern kingdom of Judah, to prophecy against the northern kingdom of Israel approximately thirty-five years before the Assyrians conquered Israel in 722 BC. At the time of Amos’ prophecies Israel enjoyed great prosperity and power. However, this wealth and prosperity led to complacency, idolatry, oppression of the poor, and hypocrisy that embraced religious ritual and activities while neglecting justice and right living.

So, the Lord proclaims to Israel, “Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the peace offerings of your fattened animals, I will not look upon them. Take away from me the noise of your songs...I will not listen. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream” (5:22-24).

Israel was failing to live in the way God called them to live, in a way that honored him and others. Rather than obeying his command to love him (Deut. 6:5) and others (Lev. 19:18b), they lived self-indulgent lives that put themselves first (see above verse).

They ignored God’s call throughout Scripture to care for one another, taking special care of the poor, the needy, the ill, the outcasts. They ignored Deut.15:11: “For there will never cease to be poor in the land. Therefore I command you, ‘You shall open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and to the poor in your land.’” They forgot Proverbs 14:31: “Whoever oppresses a poor man insults his Maker, but he who is generous to the needy honors him.”

In the New Testament, Jesus sends those who ignore the needy to “the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matt.25:41). But to those who listen to his command to love he says, “‘Come...inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me’” (Matt. 25:34b-36).

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