

**WESTMINSTER**  
PRESBYTERIAN  
**CHURCH**



SERMON

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# Seek Good

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## Introduction

Last week, we found God with Elijah in the sound of sheer silence.

Today, we will hear God roar through the prophet Amos.<sup>1</sup>

Prophetic speech is often poetic. The imagery, metaphors, and rhythm are meant to open our imaginations to a perspective beyond our own experience. The prophets reveal what is not seen, not understood, not the commonsense consensus of their audience...but what, nonetheless, is true.

When Amos spoke to the Northern Kingdom of Israel in the 8th century BCE, the upper crust of society was feeling pretty good. It was a time of stability and economic prosperity for the nation's rulers, landowners, and religious elite.

But Amos had a different perspective.

He was a shepherd and a farmer from across the southern border in Judah. He was an outsider to those whom God sent him. He was not elite. He was not a religious leader. But he could see clearly what those in Israel preferred to ignore—corruption, oppression, and the poor being trampled by the rich.

Sometimes we need the roar of God's prophets to shake us out of the stupor of our complacency.

Amos delivers.

Before we read God's message through him, please join me in prayer.

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<sup>1</sup> Amos 1:2, "The Lord roars from Zion, and utters his voice from Jerusalem..."

## Prayer for Illumination

Holy God,  
In the noise of our time,  
your voice still cuts through, reminding us of what is right.  
Speak through this ancient text,  
speak through the ache of injustice,  
and remove every barrier in our hearts to your truth,  
until your goodness becomes the natural flow of our lives.  
Amen.

## Scripture

### Amos 5:14-15, 21-24

Seek good and not evil,  
that you may live,  
and so the Lord, the God of hosts, will be with you,  
just as you have said.

<sup>15</sup> Hate evil and love good,  
and establish justice in the gate;  
it may be that the Lord, the God of hosts,  
will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph...

<sup>21</sup> I hate, I despise your festivals,  
and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies.

<sup>22</sup> 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.

<sup>23</sup> Take away from me the noise of your songs;  
I will not listen to the melody of your harps.

<sup>24</sup> But let justice roll down like water  
and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

## Streams and Dams

Our family vacation this year was to Colorado, with a stop in Rocky Mountain National Park. I love being in the mountains. During this visit, I drove the kids up Alpine Drive up, up, up to about 12,000 ft, where there were still patches of snow along the trails.

Those snow patches would continue to melt through the summer, water trickling down the mountain passes, down, down, down, into streams eventually into the Colorado River. That same river whose persistent flow has carved out the Grand Canyon over millions of years.

A barely noticeable trickle, to a stream, to a rushing river that has transformed the landscape.

“Let justice roll,” said the poet-prophet, “And righteousness flow.”

However, we don’t always let the water flow.

For almost 100 years, the Elwha River in Washington State was plugged by two dams. Built during the early 1900s logging boom, the dams fueled regional growth—but at a cost. The dams also “blocked the migration of salmon upstream, disrupted the flow of sediment downstream, and flooded the historic homelands and cultural sites of the Lower Elwha Klallam Tribe.”<sup>2</sup>

In 2012, the first dam was removed. Salmon began to repopulate. In 2014, the second was removed. Sediment was

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<sup>2</sup>“Elwha River Restoration,” accessed November 6, 2025, <https://www.nps.gov/olym/learn/nature/elwha-ecosystem-restoration.htm>.

pushed down the river, creating a diverse ecosystem. The Lower Elwha Klallam's land was restored.

We can imagine streams rolling down and dams bursting open. Justice and righteous flowing endlessly from the heart of God. God's goodness finding the lowest ground— making its path to the least, the lost, the vulnerable.

But ancient Israel blocked the path of justice, and so do we.

## **The Worship God Hates**

If we go back a few verses, we get a glimpse of what has God so riled up.

Sometimes the language of our Scripture, the religious terms and poetry—talk of fattened calves and sacrifices—can make it seem irrelevant to our time and place.

The modern language of the Message translation can bridge the gap between times.

Listen to the words of Amos 5:10-13,  
Here it is, bluntly spoken:

Because you run roughshod over the poor  
and take the bread right out of their mouths,  
You're never going to move into  
the luxury homes you have built.  
You're never going to drink wine  
from the expensive vineyards you've planted.

I know precisely the extent of your violations,  
the enormity of your sins. Appalling!  
You bully right-living people,

taking bribes right and left and kicking the poor when they're down.

Justice is a lost cause. Evil is epidemic.  
Decent people throw up their hands.  
Protest and rebuke are useless,  
a waste of breath.

God roars about taxes. About food insecurity. About a justice system that treats the wealthy differently than the poor. About corruption. And about apathy and nihilism.

God roars about people's businesses, properties, and everyday choices—that become norms, that become culture. God roars about the unjust execution of the law. And about the posture of hearts— that amid injustice, God's people have sought their own comfort.

God roars about the people thanking God for the lives they built upon injustice.

Amos spoke in Bethel during the Festival of Booths. This was a celebration of the harvest, a remembrance of God's provision in the wilderness, an intercession for God to continue the rain that the land would need in the next growing season.

The economy was booming for those on top, so they came with praises. Loud music. Dancing. Fattened calves and grain offerings. Showing how much they could afford to give back to the Lord who had so blessed them.

The poor would have been there, too. Praying to God for enough. Enough to get through the winter. Enough to pay off the debts they had accrued. Enough to feed their children, to

cloth their families, to stash away in a time and place with no safety net.

God roared over the sounds of worship, quieting the music, stilling the dancing, halting the sacrifices, that the rich might finally hear the cries of the poor. That God's people might finally turn their eyes from heaven to see God in the face of their neighbor.

### **Dorothy Day's Vision**

Activist and journalist, Dorothy Day, saw the face of God in the poor, as more were added to their number daily during the Great Depression.

She had, as an adolescent, experienced the trauma of sudden poverty. Her father had been a journalist in San Francisco, until the 1906 earthquake destroyed the paper's offices. This was a time long before Zoom, and without the office there was no paper and no employment. Day's family moved to Chicago and lived in a tenement home, barely scraping by. Eventually, her father found employment, and the family moved to a spacious home in the city's North Side. But the shame, the anxiety, and the powerlessness of those difficult years were formative for Dorothy Day.

During the Great Depression, she lived in New York and walked past long lines of those waiting for food, some with signs asking for work, trying to hang on to their dignity. She could not ignore them. They were her brothers and sisters. They were Christ looking her in the eye. They were her. She was no better, no different, no more deserving of work, of food, of security and stability.

The Catholic Worker movement, of which she was a co-founder, responded by creating houses of hospitality. Where those without adequate food and shelter could come and get what they needed, including community. The poor were met with dignity. There was no separation between the served and serving— all worked together to make the community run.

This is righteousness.

When Amos speaks of righteousness flowing like an everlasting stream, he is not talking about personal piety. He is not talking about worship that is vertical alone— my relationship with God. Righteousness is right relationship up and down, side to side. It is right relationship with God—understanding that God is God and we are not, walking humbly with our creator. And it is equitable relationship between people, regardless of their social standing—understanding that we are all made in God’s image.

Hospitality Houses grew out of the advocacy of the Catholic Worker paper. People needed to be fed *and* the structures and systems that let them fall through the cracks needed to be challenged. To break the dam of injustice, a vision was needed that flowed from the experiences of the poor, the oppressed, and the marginalized.

As Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote, “We are not to simply bandage the wounds of victims beneath the wheels of injustice, we are to drive a spoke into the wheel itself.”

That is justice.

When Amos speaks of justice rolling down like water, he is not talking about “bad guys” getting what’s coming to them. He’s talking about a vision of God’s good earth where all people

flourish. He's talking about removing whatever is in the way of that.

Dorothy Day put it this way, "What we would like to do is change the world--make it a little simpler for people to feed, clothe, and shelter themselves as God intended them to do. And, by fighting for better conditions, by crying out unceasingly for the rights of the workers, the poor, of the destitute...We can throw our pebble in the pond and be confident that its ever-widening circle will reach around the world. We repeat, there is nothing we can do but love, and, dear God, please enlarge our hearts to love each other, to love our neighbor, to love our enemy as our friend."<sup>3</sup>

## Seek Good

That is the worship God desires.

Hearts of gratitude that do not just flow upward in thanks, but downward and outward to the bottom of our hierarchies and the margins of our communities. Praise that shakes the walls that separate people, that tumble the structures we have built up that make the rich richer and the poor poorer.

In our country, wealth inequality has increased exponentially since the 1980's. In 2024, the top 1% held 30.5% of the country's wealth, while the bottom 50% held 2.5%. We know this. This has been talked about ad nauseam for decades. And like a living parable, we now see lavish parties thrown at the highest levels of society while SNAP benefits are halted or cut for families in need. We see the stock market going up and up

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<sup>3</sup>"Love is the Measure," published June 1, 1946 in the Catholic Worker Paper, accessed on November 6, 2025, <https://catholicworker.org/425-2/>.

and up, while wages remain stagnant for laborers at the bottom.

This isn't about our partisan fights. This is about our worship.

We may find solace in the songs we sing. Peace in the prayers we pray. Hope in the Gospel we proclaim. Amid the chaos of a world outside our control, worship anchors to the one who holds all things together.

But God doesn't call us only to praise, only to admire, only to pour out our burdens to him.

God calls us also to follow. To go. To let justice roll and righteousness roll down.

I often return to a phrase that Rob Bell once said, "We are the committee."<sup>4</sup>

Is this how we want things to be?

We are not helpless. We are not hopeless. The Mighty God, Lord of Hosts is with us. But God is not content to remain in the sanctuary. God is calling us out to seek good in this time and place.

As God spoke to Israel, God speaks to us: Seek good and live. There is no definite article— we are not all seeking the one good thing. You do not need to be Dorothy Day or Dietrich Bonhoeffer or Amos. There is good for you to seek.

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<sup>4</sup> "We are the Committee," published October 29, 2017, <https://robbell.com/podcast-episode/we-are-the-committee/>.

Each act of righteousness trickles, rolling into a stream, roaring into a river, strong and persistent enough to change the entire landscape.

Each act of justice hammers another hole in the dam, forming cracks and leaks that grow, until the waters are set free, and life teems in the flowing river.

We are the committee. We can feed those who need to be fed. We can pay a livable wage to our employees. We can vote with the poor in mind, protest and write and call to move the hearts of elected public servants. We can write the poetry that imagines a new world into being. We can teach ESL, drive our neighbor to the doctor, show respect to those who look, speak, and believe differently than we do.

We can worship with our lives until God's justice and righteous simply flow out of our hearts.

"People say, what is the sense of our small effort?" Dorothy Day said, "They cannot see that we must lay one brick at a time, take one step at a time. A pebble cast into a pond causes ripples that spread in all directions. Each one of our thoughts, words and deeds is like that. No one has a right to sit down and feel hopeless. There is too much work to do."<sup>5</sup>

Amen.

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<sup>5</sup> This is a widely circulated quote, with its origins claimed in the Catholic Worker paper. The exact source is unknown. Accessed November 8, 2025, <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/397427-people-say-what-is-the-sense-of-our-small-effort>.





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