**#53 SG BCP 18 September 2022 Trinity 14**

**Amos 8:4-7**

**4**Hear this, you that trample on the needy,  
    and bring to ruin the poor of the land,  
**5**saying, ‘When will the new moon be over  
    so that we may sell grain;  
and the sabbath,  
    so that we may offer wheat for sale?  
We will make the ephah small and the shekel great,  
    and practise deceit with false balances,  
**6**buying the poor for silver  
    and the needy for a pair of sandals,  
    and selling the sweepings of the wheat.’

**7**The Lord has sworn by the pride of Jacob:  
Surely I will never forget any of their deeds.

# Luke 16:1-13

### The Parable of the Dishonest Manager

**16**Then Jesus[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+16%3A+1-13&version=NRSVA#fen-NRSVA-25614a)] said to the disciples, ‘There was a rich man who had a manager, and charges were brought to him that this man was squandering his property. **2**So he summoned him and said to him, “What is this that I hear about you? Give me an account of your management, because you cannot be my manager any longer.” **3**Then the manager said to himself, “What will I do, now that my master is taking the position away from me? I am not strong enough to dig, and I am ashamed to beg. **4**I have decided what to do so that, when I am dismissed as manager, people may welcome me into their homes.” **5**So, summoning his master’s debtors one by one, he asked the first, “How much do you owe my master?” **6**He answered, “A hundred jugs of olive oil.” He said to him, “Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it fifty.” **7**Then he asked another, “And how much do you owe?” He replied, “A hundred containers of wheat.” He said to him, “Take your bill and make it eighty.” **8**And his master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly; for the children of this age are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than are the children of light. **9**And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of dishonest wealth[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+16%3A+1-13&version=NRSVA#fen-NRSVA-25622b)] so that when it is gone, they may welcome you into the eternal homes.[[c](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+16%3A+1-13&version=NRSVA" \l "fen-NRSVA-25622c" \o "See footnote c)]

**10**‘Whoever is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much; and whoever is dishonest in a very little is dishonest also in much. **11**If then you have not been faithful with the dishonest wealth,[[d](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+16%3A+1-13&version=NRSVA" \l "fen-NRSVA-25624d" \o "See footnote d)] who will entrust to you the true riches? **12**And if you have not been faithful with what belongs to another, who will give you what is your own? **13**No slave can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.’[[e](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+16%3A+1-13&version=NRSVA#fen-NRSVA-25626e)]

I used to work at the Theatre with a Stage Manager who sent all of his emails in capitals and without punctuation, so it felt like that he was shouting all of the time. So you’d get a message saying

FULL COMPANY REHEARSAL ONSTAGE 5PM PROMPT LATECOMERS WILL BE WHIPPED MUSIC DEPARTEMENT WE NEED A PIANO

And although in the Music Office we were always prepared, we’d always double check to make sure you’d done what he’d asked! Amos always seems like that to me, that he’s shouting at you – and that ‘aways’ sounds like I know his writings well, which I don’t, which is the reason I’m talking about him today. Acknowledging that almost all prophets in the Hebrew Bible exhibit moral outrage, Amos seems to have been just downright hopping mad.

His prophecy, which scholars say was written between 760 and 750 BCE, rages against social and political injustices of his day. And, if we ever feel out of our depth when reading Amos and prophets like him, its good to remember that he wrote into a society that lived 700 or so years before Jesus; from where we are, 2000 years after Jesus, it’s a remote society and a remote mindset indeed. If its confusing – being a 3000-year-old book, well, it will be won’t it? So, if we need a little background research, then that must be fair enough.

Our tiny snapshot has all the hallmarks of us having walked in with Amos in mid-tirade. Just a few lines before our reading, in chapter 8 lines 1-2, we find that its God who is speaking our lines, and he has an exchange where angry Amos appears to be at his most facetious, even with God. The verse starts -

***8****Then the Sovereign Lord showed me another vision. In it I saw a basket filled with ripe fruit.****2****“What do you see, Amos?” he asked.*

*I replied, “A basket full of ripe fruit.”*

I don’t know if it’s my Spike Milliganesque sense of humour, but I here see God fixing Amos with an icy glare, before launching into our lines.

Why was Amos so unhappy?

He is a simple man, who feels let down by his leaders. In 7: 14 we learn a little about him; ‘I’m not a professional prophet, and I never trained to be one’ he says. ‘I’m just a shepherd, and I take care of sycamore trees.’ This pastoral world seems reflected in how he writes; I’ve felt that the prophet Hosea, for instance, seems to be mainly concerned with over-riding religious ills, while Amos is more concerned with social or political, domestic, ills. He feels remote from ‘corporate’ religion.

He deals mainly with Israel’s maladies, he condemns them, and he looks forward to a time when Israel is restored; he looks forward to a time when ‘the grain and grapes grow faster than they can be harvested, …the hills of Israel will drip with sweet wine!’

But for now, he is disillusioned. Perhaps the most famous line in Amos, and the one that captures the essence of his thinking, is 5: 24; ‘I want to see a mighty flood of justice, an endless river of righteous living’. Through the book he has been building upto this point, and his political and social emphasis seems to have been frustrated by the religious structure of his society; he is disgusted by his perception of hypocrisy in the clergy, which draws him to say this;

‘I loathe, I spurn your festivals,

I am not appeased by your solemn assemblies

If you offer me burnt offerings – or your meal offerings –

I will not accept them, I will pay no heed.

Spare me the sound of your hymns…’

He seems to be condemning false worship here, alongside the hypocrisy and political ills. And actually, our reading shows people wishing the sabbath holidays, God’s holy day, to be over, so that they can get back to making money. And this lack of Godliness is driving him up the wall.

What might Amos say if he was here today?

Well, I think you’d know that he was in the room! In trying to imagine his voice, I’ve kept coming back to an image of the forcefulness and directness that the late Reverend Ian Paisley senior used to show in his career. Very different ministers, but in my mind’s eye, perhaps a similar delivery?

Amos is really highlighting his disapproval of the concentration of wealth and the corresponding increase in poverty in his times; he is saying that a nation can be judged by how it treats its members who are in the most need; he is saying that religious hypocrisy and economic injustice has no place in a civilised society. Jesus, who is, in the Jewish Tradition, merely a *later* minor prophet, says the same when he says in our Gospel ‘You cannot serve God and wealth.’

Although I resist any notion that Hebrew Scripture writings ‘mean’ or unequivocally ‘point toward’ Jesus, I find it fascinating that, in their different styles, Amos and the Gospel today give two presentations of the same idea, almost 3000 years apart. So we can see Jesus as continuing the emphasis of the prophets. Rather than the Hebrew Scriptures pointing forwards toward Jesus, I see Jesus as referring back to them. Which is the direction of travel?

Jesus’s family feel with the old prophets is, for me, is a reason to read people like Amos; perhaps if we read Amos, and we might get a glimpse of where Jesus’s thoughts came from. Our reading from Amos ends ‘Surely I will never forget any of their deeds,’ and while I’m taking that wholly out of context here, and I think it might pay well if we afforded Amos and the other prophets the same courtesy, if we spent just a little more time in their world. The ancient prophets represented the tradition that Jesus came from, that he loved and that he lived by after all – and so that recommendation of them for a ‘reading list’ is good enough for any of us.

Amen.