

Amos 5

18 Alas for you who desire the day of the Lord!

Why do you want the day of the Lord?

It is darkness, not light;

19 as if someone fled from a lion,

and was met by a bear;

or went into the house and rested a hand against the wall,

and was bitten by a snake.

20 Is not the day of the Lord darkness, not light,

and gloom with no brightness in it?

21 I hate, I despise your festivals,

and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies.

22 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.

23 Take away from me the noise of your songs;

I will not listen to the melody of your harps.

24 But let justice roll down like waters,

and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream

Psalm 70

Hurry, God, to deliver me;

hurry, Lord, to help me!

2 Let those who seek my life be ashamed and humiliated!

Let them fall back and be disgraced—

those people who delight in my downfall!

3 Let those who say, “Aha! Aha!”

stop because of their shameful behavior.

4 But let all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you,

and let those who love your saving help say again and again:

“God is great!”

5 But me? I’m poor and needy.

Hurry to me, God!

You are my helper and my deliverer.

Oh, Lord, don’t delay!

1 Thessalonians 4

13 Brothers and sisters, we want you to know about people who have died so that you won’t mourn like others who don’t have any hope. 14 Since we believe that Jesus died and rose, so we also believe that God will bring with him those who have died in Jesus. 15 What we are saying is a message from the Lord: we who are alive and still around at the Lord’s coming definitely won’t go ahead of those who have died. 16 This is because the Lord himself will come down from

heaven with the signal of a shout by the head angel and a blast on God's trumpet. First, those who are dead in Christ will rise. 17 Then, we who are living and still around will be taken up together with them in the clouds to meet with the Lord in the air. That way we will always be with the Lord. 18 So encourage each other with these words.

Matthew 25

"At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten young bridesmaids who took their lamps and went out to meet the groom. 2 Now five of them were wise, and the other five were foolish. 3 The foolish ones took their lamps but didn't bring oil for them. 4 But the wise ones took their lamps and also brought containers of oil.

5 "When the groom was late in coming, they all became drowsy and went to sleep. 6 But at midnight there was a cry, 'Look, the groom! Come out to meet him.'

7 "Then all those bridesmaids got up and prepared their lamps. 8 But the foolish bridesmaids said to the wise ones, 'Give us some of your oil, because our lamps have gone out.'

9 "But the wise bridesmaids replied, 'No, because if we share with you, there won't be enough for our lamps and yours. We have a better idea. You go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.' 10 But while they were gone to buy oil, the groom came. Those who were ready went with him into the wedding. Then the door was shut.

11 "Later the other bridesmaids came and said, 'Lord, lord, open the door for us.'

12 "But he replied, 'I tell you the truth, I don't know you.'

13 "Therefore, keep alert, because you don't know the day or the hour.

Sermon

Lord open my lips and my mouth will declare your praise. Lord open our heads and our lives will sing out your name. Amen.

At first glance, these readings seem smushed together in a sort of scriptural strange bedfellows joke. Amos is all sorts of angry, prophesying the Day of the Lord as bad news for those who believed it to be good. The psalmist cries out for God's quick return, hoping in divine deliverance. Thessalonians talks about bodily resurrection. And in Matthew, Jesus shares a parable about anticipating and preparing for the the bridegroom's return. They're all obviously related to the coming of God's Kingdom, but we seem to have all sorts of differing accounts, or perspectives, on the meaning of Christ's return. To me, it feels kind of like grabbing lasagna, gelato, espresso, and a caprese salad, then throwing them into a blender, just because they're all Italian foods. Mashed

up, they don't really make all that much sense. And they sure don't taste good that way.

Since we're now in my last three weeks here, I'm going to take a point of privilege by preaching on one of my favorite passages in all of scripture: Amos 5. It might seem strange to love a passage so obviously full of anger, but I'm not enamored with the anger itself. I'm in love with the inevitable return of justice and righteousness.

Anticipation is a funny thing. We don't just anticipate things that we love. We also anticipate things that we fear. We anticipate things that we know and the vast unknown. We anticipate all sorts of things, but the one thing that binds them all in common is this: we anticipate things that we care about. I greatly anticipated the release of *The Orville*, a new science fiction television series, not knowing whether it would be good. When a friend texts us, "we need to talk," we anticipate that conversation without knowing the

content of the dialogue or intent of the person. While Amos's contemporaries were anticipating the Day of the Lord, they assumed that they were blameless and that God's return would only mean more abundance for them. That the day of the Lord would serve their selfishness rather than reflect God's selflessness. Amos is basically a prototype of Lee Corso on ESPN College Gameday, holding out the bony finger of a prophet and shouting, "NOT SO FAST."

I've recently begun watching a relatively new sitcom called, *The Good Place*. The premise is simple: a woman named Eleanor ends up in heaven, or "The Good Place," but there's only one problem: she's not supposed to be there. She was infamous for her selfishness in her bodily life, so she was supposed to go to The Bad Place. The show follows the calamities that ensue as they try to discover how such a mixup happened, but something else happens: Eleanor finds love and finds capacity for good,

something that always existed within her but that she'd never accessed previously in her life. Being in The Good Place gives Eleanor a whole new perspective on priorities in her decisions and meaning in her living. Justice rolls down on her like a barrage of water. A river of righteousness changes her.

That's the genius of Amos. God's Kingdom seems like darkness to a world of selfishness. Ancient Hebrews were clamoring for God's deliverance without realizing that God's deliverance would take away their wealth. That God's salvation would eradicate their advantages over others. Amos cries out against everything from ritualism - the belief that just doing the right things in worship makes up for all of our sinful behavior outside of worship - to housing inequality. The Day of the Lord is a day that doesn't belong to us. It's a day where all of our lordship is put into perspective, where all of our privilege is lost, where balance is restored to the scales of creation. Amos doesn't mean

the Day of the Lord is bad. He does mean, though, that the coming of God's kingdom means the fall of our own provincial ways of life.

As we anticipate God's kingdom, we must also anticipate the fall of all other monarchs, dictators, governments, and ways of life. We commonly talk like the afterlife is something only for our souls, but if we listen to the wisdom of God in both testaments of scripture, God's kingdom will mean the resurrection of our bodies. We often hear about heaven as a place of abundance, of golden streets and endless tables of food, but these images don't belong to just us. They belong to everyone, equally. The justice of God will flood every pore of creation and eradicate every existence of injustice, even the ones that we prefer because we benefit. Perhaps especially those ones.

The question that Amos puts forth, and really that all the scriptures today speak to, is this: what's your commitment level to God's kingdom? We might feel uncomfortable with Jesus depicted

as this bridegroom who doesn't recognize those virgins who lacked their oil. We want Jesus to be so graceful that he's unwittingly permissive. We've made God into a pushover when Amos, and Jesus himself, is clear that this just isn't true. The day of the Lord will bring the change of the Lord, whether we're ready for it or not. We as God's people can't ignore the emptiness of our lamps and expect fullness of God's kingdom.

This is one of those areas where God's Good News challenges our definition of good. When Mary sings the magnificat, she sings *God has scattered the proud in the conceit of their heart. God put down the mighty from their thrones and exalted the lowly. God filled the hungry with good things and sent the wealthy away empty.* I'll never forget sitting in worship with a college student who said, "that's such terrible theology." Maybe it is terrible, at least for those of us that have thrones and have never been truly hungry. But if we've never been truly lowly, why would

we need God to raise us up? If we've never been hungry, why would we look to God to feed us? Why would we look to the Lord when we're so comfortable in our own lording over of creation?

With only two weeks left as your pastor, this isn't the easiest of sermons. Despite that difficulty, or perhaps because it is difficult, that's why this is so important. One of our core convictions as Christians is our shared hope in the restoration of God's kingdom. We pray for it every week: *your kingdom come and your will be done on earth as it is in heaven*. But how do that matters. It shapes our theology and our decisions. If we don't fill our lamps with oil as we wait for the Lord - if we don't prepare for the long haul and invest in the journey toward God's Kingdom - then how can we ever appreciate its magnitude when it arrives? So how do we do that? How do we faithfully wait for the Lord?

Look to where God is active, and put yourselves there. If Jesus is active and at work among people who are sick or live with

disabilities, then fill your lamp and your calendar with time with those people, because they matter to God. If Jesus is active and at work among people who are at the margins of society, who are persecuted by those in power, then fill your lamp and your checkbook with the things that matter to those people, because they matter to God. If your spending isn't serving these people, then it's not serving God's kingdom. If your building isn't serving these people, then it's not serving God's kingdom. Perhaps the best image of this that I've seen lately was a short video on a social experiment done at a Burger King. Actors portrayed a teenager being actively bullied, physically and verbally, by other adolescents, while at the same time the restaurant served burgers that had been "bullied," smashed, torn up, or otherwise poorly treated. 95% of people in the restaurant complained about their burgers condition while only 12% intervened to protect the kid from his aggressors. If we ever find ourselves caring more about the

preparation of our burgers than the health and safety of the people around us, then we, like Amos's audience, have missed the content of God's kingdom.

So what do we ultimately learn about God's kingdom through Amos 5, and through all these scriptures in this liturgical blender?

In the psalm, we see that the Kingdom of God is worth hoping for. In Matthew, we see that the Kingdom of God is worth waiting for. In Amos, we see that the Kingdom of God is not our kingdom to rule. In Thessalonians, we see that God wants all of us, our bodies, minds, and souls, all of our being, is meant for God's kingdom. Together, they help us catch a glimpse of what we're waiting for, but even more than that, they show us the kind of Kingdom life that we can live right now. Yes, the fullness of the kingdom will come to us one day, but let's live our part of the kingdom now, here, today. Amen.

