

A Sermon for DaySpring

by Eric Howell

The Burden Lifter

Amos 5:18-24

November 8, 2020

At a time of peace and prosperity in the mid 8th century BC, the people of Israel were living a good life. Assured of God's divine election as a nation, they were doing quite well. At least some of them. Oh, there were problems with some of the neighboring nations, and there's mention about an earthquake that must have shaken everyone pretty hard. But for a long time, Israel was winning. Israel had become a nation of prosperity, the comforts of prosperity enjoyed and the security of prosperity desired. It didn't really even matter who led the nation—they lived through two kings at least—the nation was doing well. It was a happy time.

Then a shepherd and sycamore tree farmer named Amos came to town. Amos' name is from the Hebrew root word that means "to lift a burden". Isn't that nice? So pastoral. What if Amos showed up now, here to us? What burden could he lift here? After 4 years of political turmoil, 8 months of a global pandemic and recession, and a week-long election day just ending yesterday with a new president, but the same country we had last week. Wouldn't it be nice to have an Amos now to lift our loads? Aren't we carrying heavy burdens right now? Wouldn't it be so nice to have a burden-lifter to come among us. Maybe we need an Amos. But be careful what you ask for.

"How are you doing?" he would ask, kindly. "Are you doing ok? It's been quite a week, hasn't it?" he would acknowledge, knowingly.

Yes, Amos, thank you for asking. It's good just to have someone listen. It has been hard; after months, even years, of the most divisive political rhetoric in generations, after weeks of early mail-in voting in a global pandemic, we finally came to election day. And then another election day. And then another and another. How are we doing? We have onset carpal tunnel syndrome from hitting refresh all day when we're supposed to be working. We check election returns, stock tickers, Twitter feeds, and Covid numbers. We've lost a lot of sleep in the last week.

We've had to worry about not only who was going to win not only the presidency, but also senate races in states we've never been to and don't know anyone living there. And the congress? Not to mention the state house and the railroad commissioner—I don't even know what that is and I'm supposed to vote for someone to have that job?

Am I doing ok? How could I be? I mean, I still have my job and my house, and I'm still a citizen of the most powerful empire in modern times, if not ever. And I have enough to eat and I'm free...but it's been a hard season.

"Well," Amos would say, "that sounds really hard." The great burden-lifter doing his thing for

us. Have you ever had someone you just feel better being around? It's like being with them, everything just seems a little easier to handle? They lift our burdens.

Thank you, Amos.

Amos?

"Yes?"

You've been such a good listener. What would you say to us today? What would God say?

"Oh, I'm not sure you're ready to hear that."

No, really, of course we are. We want to hear what God has to say to us about our lives and our futures. Just look at how ready we are.

We went to the polls. Want to see my sticker? I even took a selfie. It really happened. I griped on social media. But then I didn't gripe on social media. I get some spiritual discipline credit for that. I thanked God for the many blessings in my life. I even hash tagged my blessings.

And besides all of that, look where we are today. We've gone to great lengths to worship in a global pandemic. And to show up--that has to count for something. God must be pleased with us. Look at this. Listen to our songs. Look at our offerings of time, our talents, and our prayers.

And not just us, around the whole nation today, American Christians or Christian Americans (I always forget which order those should be in) are all gathered in worship, some of them in big churches with faith, I guess, to be mask-less. Others of them online on their zooms and Facebooks and YouTubes. Some of them with organs and others with praise bands. Look at all the preachers today, in robes and suits and skinny jeans. Come, Lord, we all say. Come Lord and be with us. We're waiting like those bridesmaids in Jesus' parable, waiting for the groom to arrive.

Amos, we're ready for God. We lift our hands in worship. We lift our hearts in praise. We say, God we praise your holy name. We trust you are still God of all, king on the throne. That's what we say, no matter what else, Jesus is king. That's what it comes down to. We know he will protect us; he will help us prosper; he will be with us. We're ready.

Amos?

"Yes?"

See what we've done?

"Yes."

See who we are?

"Oh yes."

Do you have anything to say? Does God have anything to say? We're ready. tell us. We need a Word.

"Ok. Here's your word from God: Hush."

What?

“Hush. All your songs are noise. All your words are clanging pots and pans. You aren’t ready for the Lord to come, and all your words and all your songs won’t get you ready, not until you change.

“You want a word from God? You want a day of the Lord? You want burdens lifted? Watch what you ask for because you may get it. Right now, God says, ‘I don’t care about the self-concerned distress of the already privileged, the hand-wringing fears of the walled in and fully armed. Right now, I’m not so interested in the so-called sacrifices of the settled. You have some work to do. It’s work that’s always been yours, but somewhere you’ve forgotten.’”

Ok, Amos, but, first, you should really listen to this new praise song.

“Hush!

“Right now, what I want from you is to open your eyes, your hearts, your concerns to those who are around you. I want you to remember what you seem to have forgotten about who you are as a people. What you cannot accomplish through a voting booth you go into alone; I want you to remember at the altar table you come to in community. At the table, you give and receive and share and there’s enough for all. You confess your sins and are renewed your salvation. At the table, there is no winning and losing, but there is death and resurrection. There is sign and sacrament and truth. At the eucharist table, we are all made one in God who has a call upon your life to live eucharistically.

“Lift the burdens of the poor and protect the vulnerable in your land, on your borders, and in your community. What has made some of you feel safer has made others more vulnerable; what has made you wealthy has made others poorer. The space between rich and poor is the gap between safe and unsafe, between security and insecurity. But you all belong to each another. Anything else is an illusion.”

Ok, Amos, but first, you should really see this art I bought for my wall. It has a scripture verse on it.

“Hush! I want you to care for the sojourner, even the one who is a sojourner just in your imagination. Love the other. For too long and in too many cruel ways, you have let a man’s race determine whether he has a chance in the system you’ve constructed. It’s everywhere all around you. It’s time to bring the healing of beloved community to this fragile land.

“I want you to recognize the ways that prosperity for a few is made possible by the suffering of many, and I want you to take your thumb off the scales. I want you to remember that I am a God of justice and righteousness.”

Yeah but, Amos, really you should check out the social media post I made about Jesus as king.

“Hush! I want you to realize how much people are hurting after the last few years of your collective life. Some people have megaphones for their complaints. But there are others, quiet,

silent, suffering. They don't know where they stand, and they don't know where the church stands anymore. It's time for you to show up, not with your pious words about God, but with your compassionate actions for your brothers and sisters. Live your faith. Set up an altar in the world wherever you go, a table in the wilderness of human loneliness. Fill that table with abundance and let it overflow.

"The powerful waters of justice and mighty waves of righteousness will flow from the throne of God. Whether it's a river of life for you or a river of judgment against you. . .well, that's up to you now. Remember even the name Emmanuel means God with us and God against us.

"I am Amos, the burden lifter. Emmanuel is coming. Join me in lifting the heavy weight upon your people. Become who you were made to be. Become who the cross called you to be. Become who you were called to be. Become who Jesus empowers you to be in the Holy Spirit."

Amos?

"Yes?"

Can we say something?

" . . .Yes."

We're sorry for what we've done.

We're sorry for what we've failed to do.

We confess our sins before God.

We have not loved God with all our heart, souls, or minds.

We've not loved our neighbors as we've loved ourselves.

Will God listen?

"Yes, God will listen to humble hearts. A humble and contrite heart, God will not despise. Now you're getting ready."

Come to the Table; hold these things in your heart. And hold the hope in your heart, a hope rung out through a prophet in your own time that no one would be satisfied until "justice rolls down like waters, and righteousness like a mighty stream."

A hope for a day when *all* of God's children will join hands and sing the song that echoes through history when heavy weights are cast off and hope is rekindled:

Free at last! Free at last!

Thank God Almighty, we are free at last!

Amen.