

## **Justified**

A sermon by Rev. Lee Yates, Covina Community Church (UCC), Covina, CA  
Amos 5:10-13, 18-27

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**Our scripture today is frightening.**

- It should be.
- It was intended to be.

**To be honest, it might be worse than you think.**

AMOS is writing to a RELIGIOUS NATION – at least, one that claims to be.

**AMOS is writing to a RELIGIOUS CULTURE – at least, one that claims to be.**

**That SELF-NARRATIVE of ISRAEL was that they were FOUNDED by GOD,  
And LIVED according to GOD's LAW.**

**They STRUCTURED their SOCIETY to reflect their BELIEFS and VALUES.**

- PUBLIC holidays – HOLY Days were observed
- COMMUNAL worship was VALUED as part of SOCIETY
- LIVING out the daily TRADITIONS as part of their CULTURE was CELEBRATED.

**Yet, here comes AMOS with a BIG FAT load of TRUTH that they did NOT want to hear.**

It seems that this ENLIGHTENED and RELIGIOUS society was taking advantage of the POOR.  
It seems that this SPIRITUAL and GOD CENTERED culture was using FAITH to JUSTIFY their OPPRESSIONS.

Amos talks about those who stand at the gates and doorways and speak the TRUTH being HATED.

**No one wanted to HEAR the TRUTH**

- They were COMFORTABLE with their JUSTIFICATION.
- They were COMFORTABLE with their PLACE in SOCIETY, or felt they had not RIGHT to change it.

**Does this SOUND familiar?**

A nation FOUNDED to that the PEOPLE could WORSHIP their GOD in PEACE?

A nation GROUNDED in the VALUES of COMMUNITY and FAITH that were PART of their RELIGION?

A nation STRUCTURED with PUBLIC holidays – HOLY DAYS being observed?

A nation where those who go to CHURCH are considered GOOD and VALUED?

A nation where TRADITIONS of FAITH are encouraged to be part of the CULTURE?

This, in many ways, is the AMERICAN narrative – at least ONE of them;  
Or at least PART of it...

**SURE, we have Separation of CHURCH and STATE,**

-But the CHURCH has always been a PARTER

- \*Sometimes giving POSITIVE VALUES for how to TREAT OTHERS.
- And.. \*Sometimes providing JUSTIFICATION when we FAIL.

When it was time to take land from NATIVE peoples,  
\*The CHURCH could claim we were bringing them to GOD.

When it was time to ENSLAVE people and SELL them,  
\*the CHURCH could claim it was a BIBLICAL MODEL of ordering SOCIETY.

When it was time to REPENT from this UGLY PAST,  
\*The CHURCH deflected with messages about PERSONAL SALVATION.

When people have taken to STREETS to PROTEST over the DE-HUMANIZING of OTHERS.  
\*the CHURCH has been SILENT or preached PASSIVITY **disguised** as UNITY.

**SOME have SPOKEN UP:**

- \*Dr. KING was Assassinated for standing at the GATES and shouting about injustice.
  - Remember, he was ALIVE when talking about RACISM.
  - But when he got into POVERTY and ABUSE of those with POWER, they SHOT HIM.
- \*Its not the first TIME – Tulsa Massacre in 1921 was not JUST about RACE.
  - It was a FINANCIAL District that was STRUCK.
  - It was people of COLOR building their own FINANCIAL POWER

**This is not to say that people have not DIED from RACISM.**

- \*That issue has its own list of MARTYRS
- \*Even more have DIED for simply having the WRONG PIGMINTATION or ACCENT in our HISTORY.

***But..***

When your SOCIETY is TRULY built on MONEY and POWER rather than your SHARED HUMANITY

- “others” getting POWER becomes a THREAT.
- “others” having AGENCY becomes FRIGHTENING.

**AMOS was confronting a SOCIETY where people of the SAME religion**

Of the SAME ethnicity and culture were CHEATING.  
They were OPPRESSING.  
They were MANIPULATING.

Even when we ALL look the SAME – the DESIRE to have MORE – to HORD POWER is PRESENT.

**Even when we EVOKE the NAME of GOD – when we OPEN the meeting in a PRAYER...**

- \*POOR PEOPLE tend to find themselves with LESS
- \*and SOMEONE, usually “WELL RESPECTED” tends to get MORE.

**AMOS accusations are CLEAR and STRONG:**

- You TRAMPLE the POOR and TAX them for GRAIN.
- You act RIGHTOUS but take BRIBES
- You turn away the POOR from your gates.
- You are SILENT in the face of INJUSTICE.

**This sounds WAY too FAMILIAR -- way too familiar**

- We have TAX system that is CLEARLY unfair to the POOREST
- We can't change it because we have LEGALIZED BRIBARY in many ways.
- We have been told to FEAR those beyond our borders
- We have SILENCED those who would SPEAK and JUSTIFIED those who share LIES as NEWS.

**So, what does AMOS say that GOD says about this? (Take a deep breath... this is where it gets bad)**

Woe to 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 water

and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream

- GOD is TIRED of listening to us SING about LOVE and UNITY while DIVIDING ourselves.
- **GOD is TIRED of watching us OPPRESS each other while singing about our SALVATION.**

GOD is DONE with the JESUS show and ready for us to try SHOWING some JESUS to the WORLD!

**Now, that may SOUND a little WARM and FUZZY...**

But listen to that LAST VERSE... vs. 24... LISTEN AGAIN.

**LISTEN like you live in a DESERT... with not much water.**

LISTEN like someone who is about to be FLOODED in a DESERT...

An EVER-FLOWERING --- UN-ENDING stream of RIGHTEOUSNESS.

**If you are COMFORTABLE in your REALITY --- THAT is SCARRY!**

**IF you are OPPRESSED, these are WORDS of HOPE!**

\*GOD will never STOP trying to CHANGE things.

\*GOD will ALWAYS be at WORK to CHANGE the system.

If WE are CHRISTIAN and COMFORTABLE, and **ALSO worry about those who are POOR**,  
Those who are MARGENALIZED,  
Those who are LEFT OUT,  
Those STIGMATIZED,  
Those SILENCED...

What do we DO?!

**What do we DO?**

**We sit in a VERY COMPLEXT ethical CONVERGENCE.**

An ethical CONVERGENCE... of HISTORY,

**\*For our NATOIN**

And...

**\*For CHRIST'S CHURCH**

The CHURCH has, HISTORICALLY, offered great WISDOM to our NATION (**along with some NON-SENSE**)

- Our FAITH that used to FORGIVE all DEBTS, every 50 years.
- Our FAITH that assures us that ALL PEOPLE are EQUAL and LOVED by GOD.
- Our FAITH that shows us how a PROPHET can RISE UP and SPEAK OUT.
- Our FAITH that calls us to be in SOLIDARITY with those who are OUTCAST...

It seems like our SOCIETY could us a LOT of that right now.

**If the CHURCH is to have CREDIBILITY in the years to come,**

- We MUST stand with the OPPRESSED, even when others JUSTIFY it by their FAITH.
- We MUST stand with those HURTING, even if other CHRISTIANS are HURTING them.
- We MUST Stand with those WORKING for CHANGE, even if they don't TRUST a CHURCH.

**We KNOW that GOD'S RIGHTOUSNESS is a NEVER-ENDING STREAM**

- LOVE never stops flowing.
- GRACE never stops flowing.
- COMPASSION never stops.... NEVER stops flowing from GOD and THUS it must NOT from us.

Some will say that the STATUS of our NATION

**That the WEALTH of our NATION is JUSTIFIED by GOD.**

**Some will say that our SUCCESS is PROOF of GOD'S WILL among us.**

**\*They will try to IGNORE the DEALTHS**

\*They will try to DISTRACT from the SHAMEFUL HURTS we CAUSED.

Our NATION is not JUSTIFIED by GOD -- THAT is IDOLOTRY.  
Our NATION is not INFALABLE -- THAT is IDOLOTRY.

EVEN WORSE is the practice of  
BLENDING the FAITH and PATRIOTISM together **to CONFUSE people** and PRAY on their EMOTOINS.

For TOO LONG, we have allowed people to HIDE our NATION's MISTAKES in a PRAYER.  
**For TOO LONG, we have allowed people to HIDE the CHURCH'S SIN under a FLAG.**

We keep trying to use ONE to JUSTIFY the OTHER.  
We keep trying to use ONE to SILENCE the people who are CRITISIZING the OTHER.

We can't WRAP one up in the OTHER and HOPE it goes away.  
We can't WRAP one up in the OTHER and PRETEND it BALANCES OUT --- that it JUTIFIES ITSELF.

**It does NOT.**  
It does NOT.

**So, we STAND at the GATES –**  
We STAND at the POLLS –  
**We STAND at PROTESTS and RALLEYS –**  
We STAND up to those who would BULLY us with NATIONALISM  
**Those who would BULLY us with our OWN FAITH.**

**AND...**

We SPEAK UP for those **LIVING in POVERTY**–  
and **against** ANYONE who would JUSTIFY its NECESSITY.

We SPEAK UP, alongside those **FIGHTING for their HUMAN RIGHTS** –  
and against ANYONE who would JUSTIFY their ABUSE.

Such a STAND ---  
Such a VOICE --- *sounds pretty AMERICAN...* but that is now what brings us to THIS SPACE today.

Such a STAND ---  
Such a VOICE --- **DOES sounds pretty PROPHETIC...** and we are REMINDED, that GOD is not DONE YET!

*With our NATION... or with US!*