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### **Amos 5:18-24; Ps 70; 1 Thess 4:13-18; Matt 25:1-13**

In the old days, when I used to watch the news before going to bed, the CBC had a pattern of ending the nightly news with stories that were edifying, uplifting in some way. This was meant to be a digestif after the plate full of tragedies and evil we had just had before us.

The closing clips showed simple acts of kindness human to human, or human to animal, or animal to human. Almost always these closing stories featured ordinary people doing just and loving things.

I'm not in the habit of watching the nightly news anymore. This may still go on. I do know that the media makes a point in the midst of reporting on the headlines – the catastrophes of terrorism, church shootings, hurricanes, etc. - to take a moment and focus on the acts of sacrificial kindness that also occur in these circumstances.

One of the most influential worldviews in Christian scripture has something in common with the way the media chooses its lead stories. The apocalyptic worldview presents life in the world as dire. It sees the world as is in a terrible mess – sin and evil and corruption are everywhere. Being a religious worldview, it includes God in its vision. It thinks that the only way the mess will be fixed is if God intervenes.

In the first testament, the hope for God's intervention was often talked about as the day of the Lord. We heard the prophet Amos referring to that day – the day of the Lord. The day of the Lord when the Lord would enter the muck of history and make judgements. When God's justice – the only true justice – would judge what was going on and who was responsible and then everything would be alright.

This idea of waiting for God's intervention is taken over by writers of the second testament. In the NT the idea of the day of the Lord is usually conflated with the hope for the second coming of Christ. Pretty much across the board in the range of NT writings there is the expectation that we voice in our Eucharistic liturgy: Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again.

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This hope for Christ's return – for Christ's second Advent – is typically often spoken of as 'the end,' or as 'the day,' or as the 'day of the Lord'. The expectation is that when Christ comes again all the hopes for the day of the Lord will be met – God's justice will fill the earth and the sorrows and miseries that the faithful know will end – conclusively end.

All will be well forever. Shalom will fill God's earth and the faithful ones will live peacefully together, and with God's healed creation.

Jesus' parable of the 10 virgins waiting for the bridegroom is shaped by the apocalyptic worldview.

The bridegroom represents the ultimate hope for joy and peace. I'm not sure how we are to understand the 10 to one ratio; that might be a topic for another reflection. Is it to make the bridegroom an image of marvelous abundance? Whatever the significance, the bridegroom is an image of the completion of a time of waiting. The one who will make everything alright.

By the by, the prophets often used the image of a bridegroom to refer to God's intense and passionate and committed love for Israel.

Interestingly, the most distinctively apocalyptic literature is not found in our scripture. It is found in books that didn't make it into our scripture, like 4 Ezra and 2 Baruch. In straight up apocalyptic fashion the authors of these non-canonical books understand themselves and their audience as the righteous ones who are waiting for God to enter the current mess and get rid of the bad people. Waiting expectantly and hopefully for the day of the Lord.

The authors and audience understood themselves as on the side of justice – the righteous ones; waiting for God to vindicate them, and to punish and exterminate the evil people who oppress them.

This is not how the canonical prophet Amos understands the day of the Lord. He mocks his audience for hoping for it. "Alas for you who desire the day of the Lord. Why do you want the day of the Lord? It is darkness, not light, and gloom with no brightness in it."

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Amos speaks for God and warns and chastises God's people for their absurd complacency and smugness. They are confident about what will happen to them on the day of the Lord – they are sure that they will be spared any trouble. They are doing lots of good things – solemn assemblies, sacrifices and so on.

But, God says – take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your harps. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an everflowing stream.

Amos accuses God's people of damming up righteousness and justice – of being obstacles to God's justice. And so, the day they hope for is going to be a dark day for them.

Amos reframes apocalyptic thinking. In two major ways. First, Amos challenges the people of God not to see themselves as the righteous ones.

And, second, not to think of themselves as passive – waiting for God's rescue. Amos charges that by taking that passive stance they are actively obstructing God's justice. Instead, they should participate in God's justice-making, jump into God's work of setting everything right.

Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever flowing stream.

The underlying conviction in Amos' exhortation is that God's justice and righteousness are now – are here. We are not good people victimized by evil and injustice. No. God invites us into God's energy and the presence of God's justice – now.

Justice and righteousness are present and the work of the people of God is participation in God's work of making goodness in God's creation. To LET justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever flowing stream. To be aware of the presence of God – the righteous, the just one – and to take part in God's work of creating justice.

Paul also reframes apocalyptic thinking, outlining it with the shape of Christ. Paul believes that in Christ God's justice is revealed – completely unveiled. One of Paul's most pungent and pregnant descriptions of the gospel of Jesus Christ is that “in it the righteousness/justice of God is revealed.”

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Paul believes that God's justice has entered our world in the person of Jesus Christ and that those who are in Christ are in God's justice. So, Paul tells the Christians at Thessalonica that they are children of light and children of the day.

Paul fills the scriptural theme of the day of the Lord with the concept of Christ's coming. The Greek word for coming is 'parousia'. It is used in the NT to refer to Christ's return or second coming. The first coming was Christ in a manger, the second coming will be Christ in glory.

The word 'parousia' was used by Greek writers when they described the return of a conquering hero to his hometown. On his victorious return home the conqueror would lead a great procession – a Parousia; a Parousia at the head of his soldiers, dragging the enslaved conquered behind him. The 'parousia' was a display of power and of victory for the home crowd; the demonstration that out in the field the enemy had been disempowered.

Paul uses this political image to describe his conviction that the day of the Lord will be the moment when Christ's victory over all that is at war with God – all evil, and death itself – when Christ's victory will be incontrovertibly visible. The day of the Lord will reveal that even death has been disempowered. As we have heard, Paul imagines the dead in Christ rising to meet Christ.

The day of the Lord/Christ's return reveals that life and goodness truly rule the earth. But this does not mean that we have to wait for that day in order to know this. Paul, like Amos, knew that God's justice is here/ is now.

And like the prophets before him, Paul reaches out to the people of God to say – wake up/open your eyes/look around.

Look to see the presence of God's justice and let it roll. Be part of what is. Now is the day of salvation, Paul says in 2 Corinthians. You now are in that day when sin and evil and injustice and death have been defeated. One of our Eucharistic prayers puts it that by Christ's resurrection we are brought into the light of God's presence.

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Paul says, in effect, let your eyes adjust to the daylight and know yourselves protected and enabled by God to work alongside God. In 1 Thessalonians Paul writes, since we belong to the day, let us stay awake and stay sober, wearing faithfulness and love as armour, and the hope of salvation for a helmet.

The Biblical vision invites us to look with different eyes, to hear with different ears, to look in different places and to see that now God's justice is present/that now God has defeated evil and death. Even though God hasn't made the final triumphal homecoming procession, God's campaign against God's enemies of evil and death has succeeded. Christ's resurrection from the dead is proof of this.

If we choose to believe this Biblical vision, does this mean that we pretend the horrors of our world are not there? Tune out the tough part of the news? Does it mean we do not feel the pain of grief when loved ones die?

No, Of course not. It means rather that from the light of God's presence , from life in the justice of God, we can share in the work of bringing life and justice. And we can know that violence and terror and injustice and even death have power only if we choose to let them rule over us.

In this place – at Redeemer - I regularly see evidence that you know this – although you might not want to describe it the way I just have. You know that justice and love are stronger than evil and oppression; you know that life is stronger than death.

I have watched with admiration as you have participated gently, humbly and sometimes outspokenly in working with God to create justice for the poor and the left out. I have been moved to tears when I have seen you able to find ways to face the death of your beloved ones with serene dignity; and to respond to your own illnesses and challenges with beautiful grace.

The Biblical writers seek to expand our understanding of the possible and the real. It is possible to create justice – God's justice – because the reality is that it is here and present. By virtue of being in Christ we are capable of being sensitive to the moments and places where we can share in God's work of creating justice and peace.

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The work we do will not be noticed by many people and likely not heralded in the media. And even if it were, it would be wrongly framed. As if acts of love and justice are relatively trivial compared to the real events of murder and genocide.

But this humble work of ours is in truth God's work. The most real events are those which make present now God's victory.

This is mighty work – unveiling and undamming God's justice now. Letting it roll down.

Thank you for making the good news.