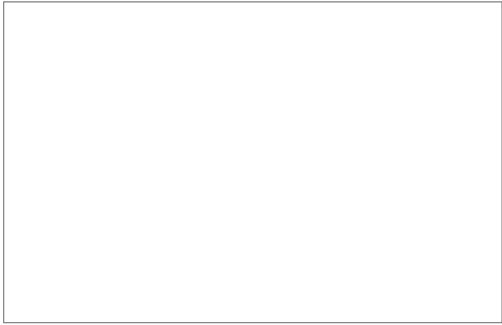


**The Lessons Appointed for
Use on the
Sunday closest to November 9**



Proper 27

Year A

RCL

Amos 5:18-24
Psalm 78:1-7
Matthew 25:1-13



The Collect

O God, whose blessed Son came into the world that he might destroy the works of the devil and make us children of God and heirs of eternal life: Grant that, having this hope, we may purify ourselves as he is pure; that, when he comes again with power and great glory, we may be made like him in his eternal and glorious kingdom; where he lives and reigns with you and the Holy

Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

AMEN

Amos 5:18-24

Thus says the Lord, the God of hosts, the Lord:

Alas for you who desire the day of the LORD!

Why do you want the day of the LORD?

It is darkness, not light;

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.

Is not the day of the LORD darkness, not light,
and gloom with no brightness in it?

I hate, I despise your festivals,
and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies.

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.

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.

Matthew 25:1-13

Jesus said, “Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this. Ten bridesmaids took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. When the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them; but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. As the bridegroom was delayed, all of them became drowsy and slept. But at midnight there was a shout, ‘Look! Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.’ Then all those bridesmaids got up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’ But the wise replied, ‘No! there will not be enough for you and for us; you had better go to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.’ And while they went to buy it, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went with

him into the wedding banquet; and the door was shut. Later the other bridesmaids came also, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open to us.' But he replied, 'Truly I tell you, I do not know you.' Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour."

SERMON

Devin Patrick Kelley had a problem with his ex-mother-in-law. He also had a problem with people who sought a relationship with God. Finally, he seems to have had a problem with God, Himself. To relieve the torment these flawed relationships caused him, he took his assault rifle, fifteen 30-round clips and two handguns and went to church. Is this really the world we live in now? Sunday's shooting at First Baptist Church of Sutherland Springs, Texas, which killed 26 people, raised the total of victims lost in mass killings this year to 208, according to USA TODAY data. Is this really the new normal?

As alarming as the numbers are I'm even more frightened of our societal response because while reporting on this horrific event, one of the news networks took an informal poll of churches to find how many had armed

guards. Not IF any had armed guards. HOW MANY had armed deacons or guards. I want you to think deeply about that, and the consequences of such a decision. I want you to think about the message our churches make to the society in which we live by such a decision while we take a look at Amos, the first of the minor prophets.

Amos was active about 750 BCE during the reign of Jeroboam II in Israel. Before we get to Amos' message, let's understand that number. In fourteen hundred and ninety two, Columbus sailed the ocean blue. That was 525 years ago. Amos wrote 750 years before the birth of Christ. He described himself as a shepherd and dresser of sycamore trees. Even if he was, in fact, a more educated man than that would imply, we are faced with the improbable fact that someone, 750 years before the birth of Christ, wrote down some words that have

somehow come down to us and now are printed in their millions in all the tongues of the world. Can you wrap your mind around how completely unlikely such a thing is? No matter where you are on the globe, you can easily obtain the words of Amos and read them for yourself. On Antiques Roadshow this week, a copy of the Bible in the Lakota tongue was shown. We have friends who are missionaries in China, an officially atheistic country. They are not to proselytize, but of course they do, sharing the words of Amos even there, and in Chinese. We have documents from Sumeria and Egypt of that period, but they tend to be proclamations of the government. What we don't have are the musings of Sumerian or Egyptian shepherds. Yet, here is Amos. How is this possible?

Amos wrote to a unique time in the history of Israel. Rather than being the weak nation and victim we usual-

ly think of, Israel under Jeroboam II was prosperous and powerful. Jeroboam ruled for 41 years, in fact, demonstrating both his skill and a settled and prosperous political system. He was victorious over the Arameans, conquered Damascus, and extended Israel to its former limits, according to the Jewish Encyclopedia. Things were peaceful and prosperous, and who could blame the Israelites for concluding that, as God's favored people, they were entitled to the comfort they were enjoying. This is the terrifying part. Amos was sent to deflate that comfortable sense of entitlement.

For the people of Israel the only cloud on their horizon was the gentile countries surrounding them, and the resolution of even this problem was certain. God, Himself, would resolve that difficulty on the day of the LORD. The "day of the LORD" was understood by all Israel to be the day when God would fight against His

and their enemies. It was to be a day of victory for Israel when God weighed the crimes against humanity committed by the gentile nations surrounding Israel, and visited destruction upon them. Imagine the surprise when this tree trimmer from Judea instead includes Israel as an enemy of God!

Thus says the Lord, the God of hosts, the Lord:
Alas for you who desire the day of the LORD!

Why do you want the day of the LORD?

It is darkness, not light;

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.

Is not the day of the LORD darkness, not light,
and gloom with no brightness in it?

Rather than the victorious affirmation of their status as God's chosen, Amos says that the day of the LORD will be darkness, not light; gloom with no brightness in

it. Israel is to be judged the same as their gentile neighbors! Just like their gentile neighbors, they must make their actions match their words. Not even their careful ritual worship will save them.

I hate, I despise your festivals,
and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies.

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.

Take away from me the noise of your songs;

I will not listen to the melody of your harps.

If Amos' low status as a shepherd and dresser of sycamore trees weren't enough to consign whatever musings crossed his mind to the black hole of history, here he is condemning the comfort felt by the people under Jeroboam II and their no-doubt sincere efforts to

perform worship appropriately. It takes little imagination to conjure what a treat that would have gone down to the people of the time. Yet, here is Amos, in our Bibles, warning that chosen people or not, we, all of us, have an obligation, a calling.

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 ever-flowing stream.

The temptation is to compare iron age Israel to contemporary America but there are significant differences. The Levant is geographically much smaller than the United States. It's population was less than 20% of West Virginia's current population. There are also significant similarities. They were wealthy and prosperous,

just as we are. They were scrupulous in their worship, just as contemporary Christians are, but seem to have had difficulty translating the tenants of their faith into the actions of their lives, just as we do. We know what we are supposed to do, we want to do what we are supposed to do, but we don't do it, just as Paul complained. Here's the part that should make the hair on your head stand up. There was an alternate first reading in the Lectionary for today, from the Book of Jonah.

“Now if you are unwilling to serve the LORD, choose this day whom you will serve, ... but as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.”

Good for Jonah, but when the people enthusiastically said they, too, chose to serve the Lord, Joshua replied:

“You cannot serve the LORD, for he is a holy God. He is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions or your sins. If you forsake the LORD and serve foreign gods, then he will turn and do you

harm, and consume you, after having done you good.” And the people said to Joshua, “No, we will serve the LORD!” Then Joshua said to the people, “You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen the LORD, to serve him.” And they said, “We are witnesses.”

After Texas, churches are investigating the advisability of arming deacons. Some have already done so. Yet, here is Amos telling us that we will be judged on the same scale as our neighbors. Here is Jonah teaching that if you trust in God, He will be true, but if you turn to other salvation, he will turn and do you harm, and consume you, after having done you good. You can hold on to what you have, for a time, by embracing violence but you ultimately must decide which you will worship – God or guns.

AMEN

BENEDICTION

The question I would like to leave with you for this week is this: are you willing to make the same commitment to your calling as a Christian that the brave men and women we honor this week made to their country? The movies, television, novels – indeed, all the forms of entertainment we enjoy – offer up the cleansing and saving power of gunpowder. That’s our culture speaking. The question the events in Texas pose to believing Christians is this, “Is it better to die in Christ, or to survive without Him?”

The Lord bless you and keep you;
the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you;
the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.

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