



# **THE NEW SHOFAR**

**Do not ignore the poor and the refugee in your midst!**

**Amos 7:12-15 - Mark 6:7-13**

## **Trinity 7**

***'O Lord GOD, cease, I beg you! How can Jacob stand? He is so small!'***

By 750<sup>B.C.</sup> the prophet Amos had seen the writing on the wall – Assyria was about to destroy the nation of Israel, wipe it from the map of history so that it never rises again. He understood his God to be the Lord of history. Yahweh was the God of the covenant, the God who had set aside the land of Canaan as Israel's possession. What he could not fathom was why this very same God was about to allow a pagan nation to take possession of that same land and destroy his chosen people. How had Israel sinned?

God's judgment was fierce *because they sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals...they lay themselves down beside every altar on garments taken in pledge... and commanded the prophets, saying, 'You shall not prophesy.'*... *because you trample on the poor and take from them levies of grain...* and so on goes the list of sins committed by God's people, sins for which they are about to be punished and a read through Amos will highlight just how absolute this punishment is to be.

***O seer, go, flee away to the land of Judah***

What was the response of the people? Amos was banned from ministering in the land! He was chased from the sacred shrine at Bethel, from the king's palace and forced to flee to safety. The reason given for this was that the king preferred to hear good news, comforting messages about how good the future was to be. He employed prophets who would give to him the kind of news from God he wanted to hear, who would keep on telling him God was happy with Israel – no matter what she did. Amos' reply was swift and clear...*Seek good and not evil, that you may live; and so the LORD, the God of hosts, will be with you, just as you have said.* <sup>15</sup> *Hate evil and love good, and establish justice in the gate...*

***the LORD said to me, "Go, prophesy to my people Israel."***

Unfortunately for Amos, his life was not to be the peaceful farming existence he craved. He was sent by God straight back to Israel to deliver a message his people just did not want to hear. Whether they wanted the message or not was not to be in the prophet's consideration. It was a revelation that had to be preached. God's word pure and simple was to be its content even though it would be rejected, ridiculed, ignored and the one preaching it abused and cast aside. The prophet does not get to choose what to preach and has no authority to change what God has said and set in place.

And what was in that message that so terrified Israel? God was telling them how they were living a lie. They came to the temple to offer sacrifice but then lie down *on garments taken in pledge* from a poor person desperate for a loan. *They abhor the one who speaks the truth and trample on the poor.* The sins of the people, *crimes* for which they are about to pay a very high price are sins against the vulnerable and the needy in their midst. Their covenant with God is about to be smashed beyond repair because they *oppress the poor and crush the needy* and then presume to offer sacrifices of praise to God.

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## ***let justice roll down like waters, righteousness like an ever-flowing stream***

The problem God has with Israel was as simple as it was clear. The people went on with their religious lives presuming all was right with God. They offered sacrifices and prayers, sang hymns and made offerings at the altar, they praised God in the glory of the temple at Bethel. While this was going on they turned their backs on the poor, stepped over them on their way to daily prayer and made their ears deaf to the cries of the orphans and the widows. Israel – led by the king, the priests and the court prophets – had misunderstood what it was God wanted, what God was demanding of them. What God wants is *love, not sacrifice*. Only when the people were defined by *just and righteous* living would their sacrificial offerings be acceptable to God and their prayers heard.

This is why they drove God's prophet from the land. What they demanded from their prophets was good news, messages that confirmed their thinking, supported their decisions and ways of acting. They wanted to be comforted, praised, affirmed in all they were doing, and reassured that God was with them all the way. This was something Amos could not do. He was God's prophet. He was not Israel's prophet. He was called to deliver God's message to the people whether they wanted to listen or not.

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

This is one tough talking God! This is a God who *hates* the prayers, the hymns, the sacrifices and the offerings the faithful are bring to him! *Hates?* Why? Because they do not first of all reach out to the poor, because justice is not what defines the way they live in his presence. Their spiritual ways are hypocritical and an insult to God. This is what Amos is telling them and yet, instead of repenting and seeking to allow God to transform the way they live, they persecute the prophet.

Amos preaches a God with absolute sovereign power over the whole of the earth, a God who is to be obeyed, whose laws are to be followed and lived to the fullest. Men and women are great and wonderful, but they remain only creatures, not gods. It is when they lose sight of this things begin to go wrong with every individual acting as though he or she was god in their own little worlds. God was God long before the first atom of the universe was put into place and yet they continue to think of themselves as the ones who make the world what it is today. They are blind gods, seeing only what they want to see and hearing only what affirms what they have already believed to be the truth. Such is the message of Amos.

### ***He called the twelve and began to send them out***

Things had not changed much by the time the Prophet Jesus came among the people and proclaimed the Good News from God. People still did not want to hear the Truth. They wanted to be told *all is well* and their ways were acceptable to God. This prophet too they rejected on account of his teachings. He too called upon the people to *repent*, to be a source of *good news to the poor, the prisoner, the widow, the orphan and to all who are in need*. They were to embrace the *leper* and show *kindness to the foreigner in the land*. However, what the people wanted to do was to continue with what they had been doing all their lives. What Jesus preached was renewal. Repentance. Justice and love.

The great thing about today's Gospel is how faithfulness to the will of God produces its own fruit. Jesus sent his disciples out and *so they went out and proclaimed that all should repent*.<sup>13</sup> *They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them*. Those who embrace God's word transform the lives of others. To a world where injustices abound, where refugees are demonized, the weak exploited and the rich continue to grow their wealth while those with little find themselves with even less than they need to survive, God sends his prophets, the disciples of his Son.

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