

Proper 21



Prayer of the Day

God of love, you know our frailties and failings. Give us your grace to overcome them; keep us from those things that harm us; and guide us in the way of salvation; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amos 6:1a, 4-7

{1a} Alas for those who are at ease in Zion, and for those who feel secure on Mount Samaria....
{4} Alas for those who lie on beds of ivory, and lounge on their couches, and eat lambs from the flock, and calves from the stall; {5} who sing idle songs to the sound of the harp, and like David improvise on instruments of music; {6} who drink wine from bowls, and anoint themselves with the finest oils, but are not grieved over the ruin of Joseph! {7} Therefore they shall now be the first to go into exile, and the revelry of the loungers shall pass away.

"In this woe-saying Amos sketches the well-being enjoyed by the upper classes in the capital cities, the splendid society that was built on the misery of the weak and poor.... Both Samaria and Zion (Jerusalem) were royal cities whose history was directly linked with the monarchy in Israel and Judah. Neither had a tradition of identity with the people and their past." [1]

4-6: "Every item represents a luxurious sophistication that had been possible in earlier times only for royalty, and remained a world apart from the life in the villages. The hollowness of it all only becomes apparent in 6c where this heedless hedonism is thrown into relief against the 'ruin of Joseph' from which it is completely insulated." [2]

the ruin of Joseph: "The 'ruin of Joseph' alludes to Israel's condition which, between 738 and 733, became ever more precarious as the state came under the deepening shadow of the vast Assyrian empire, till at the end of the period it had lost most of its territorial possessions." [3]

7. *they shall now be the first to go into exile*: The irony is that those who have enjoyed such luxury and ignored the suffering of their countrymen and women shall lead the captives into exile.

Psalms 146

{1} Praise the LORD! Praise the LORD, O my soul! {2} I will praise the LORD as long as I live; I will sing praises to my God all my life long. {3} Do not put your trust in princes, in mortals, in whom there is no help. {4} When their breath departs, they return to the earth; on that very day their plans perish. {5} Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD their God, {6} who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them; who keeps faith forever; {7} who executes justice for the oppressed; who gives food to the hungry. The LORD sets the prisoners free; {8} the LORD opens the eyes of the blind. The LORD lifts up those who are bowed down; the LORD loves the righteous. {9} The LORD watches over the strangers; he upholds the orphan and the widow, but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin. {10} The LORD will reign forever, your God, O Zion, for all generations. Praise the LORD!

Psalms 146 is a part of the so-called "Great Hallel," Psalms 146-150. It is a individual song of Thanksgiving.

1-2: A self-exhortation to praise that will continue throughout the psalmist's life.

3-4: The singer exhorts the auditors not to put their confidence in human beings who are mortal.

5-9: Those who are "happy" or blessed "are those whose help is the God of Jacob." What Yahweh does for those who trust him is set out in a series of statements that cover God's creative acts and his actions in the interest of justice for the oppressed, the afflicted, the righteous and the helpless.

10: Yahweh will exercise such authority forever, longer even than the psalmist's praise.

1 Timothy 6:6-19

{6} Of course, there is great gain in godliness combined with contentment; {7} for we brought nothing into the world, so that we can take nothing out of it; {8} but if we have food and clothing, we will be content with these. {9} But those who want to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. {10} For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains. {11} But as for you, man of God, shun all this; pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness. {12} Fight the good fight of the faith; take hold of the eternal life, to which you were called and for which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. {13} In the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, I charge you {14} to keep the commandment without spot or blame until the manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ, {15} which he will bring about at the right time—he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords. {16} It is he alone who has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see; to him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen. {17} As for those who in the present age are rich, command them not to be haughty, or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. {18} They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share, {19} thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that really is life.

6. *great gain in godliness with contentment*: The "gain" is not financial but spiritual. Eusebia, "godliness" "virtually stands for the entire life of the community shaped by *pistis* [faith] (3:9, 16)." [4]

7. *we brought nothing...we can take nothing*: A thought similar to Job 1:21: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there."

8. *we will be content*: To be content stands in contrast to the "eagerness to be rich" which leads to ruin and destruction.

10. *the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil*: See also Hebrews 13:5. To be a "lover of money" was a disqualification for a bishop or deacon (1 Timothy 3:2f., 8), and are to be avoided by the faithful (2 Timothy 3:1-5).

11. *shun all this, pursue righteousness...*: Rather than the vices noted in verses 4-5 the godly are to pursue the virtues of righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness.

12. *Fight the good fight of faith*: Paul uses athletic imagery in 1 Corinthians 9:24-26 and Colossians 4:12.

you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses: Jesus made "the good confession" before Pilate. "This confession of Christ, which is judicially pronounced before the authorities, is the model of forensic confession to which the Christian is called in discipleship (Mt. 10:32; Lk. 12:8), the example of public declaration which the one who bears witness knows that he is obliged to make (Jn. 1:20; 9:22; 12:42), and also the basic constituent in the liturgical and cultic baptismal confession which is solemnly recited at reception of the sacrament and ordination.... Because Timothy has made this binding confession he is committed to passing on the proclamation, keeping the commandment and walking without blame until Christ is manifested." [5] Timothy had been imprisoned according to Hebrews 13:23, so this confession may have one made before public authorities confessing Jesus to be the Messiah. Others suggest either a baptismal confession, or one connected with his ordination.

13. *I charge you*: In Greek *parangello*. It is verb that is used of Jesus' command to an unclean spirit to depart (Luke 8:29), or Paul's command to the python spirit to leave the slave girl in Philippi (Acts 16:18), and other similar directives. Here Timothy is placed under Paul's solemn injunction, while in 4:11; 5:7; and 6:17 Timothy is to place others under his solemn injunction to act or abstain.

14. *the manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ*: The eschatological appearance of the Lord.

16. *he alone who has immortality*: Immortality is a quality that can only be properly applied to God. Our "immortality" is to be "put on" in the resurrection (Romans 2:7; 1 Corinthians 15:53-54), and is completely in the competence of God to grant or withhold.

17. *those...who are rich...set their hopes on...riches...God who richly provides...to be rich in good works*: "There is a deliberate wordplay at work in verses 16-17 (sic. Should be 17-18) using variations on 'rich'...: the rich are not to rely on riches but on God, who gives richly, and they are to be rich in good deeds!" [6]

19. *the life that really is life*: Real life is to share in God's own life. Such life does not consist in possessions or wisdom or even in good works but in God alone, who then distributes his gifts as he will so we may use his gifts to glorify him.

Luke 16:19-31

{19} "There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. {20} And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, {21} who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man's table; even the dogs would come and lick his sores. {22} The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried. {23} In Hades, where he was being tormented, he looked up and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side. {24} He called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in agony in these flames.' {25} But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that during your lifetime you received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in agony. {26} Besides all this, between you and us a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who might want to pass from here to you cannot do so, and no one can cross from there to us.' {27} He said, 'Then, father, I beg you to send him to my father's house-- {28} for I have five brothers--that he may warn them, so that they will not also come into this place of torment.' {29} Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them.' {30} He said, 'No, father Abraham; but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' {31} He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'"

19-25: The theme of the first part of the reading is that of rich and poor, their condition and their destiny. Its conclusion is the reversal of fortunes of Mary's song (Luke 1:53,) and the first beatitude, "Blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of God" (Luke 6:20). The difference in the circumstances of the rich man and the poor man and drawn very harshly, but no judgment is made about their moral condition.

19. *a rich man*: The rich man is not named in the standard text, but the Bodmer Papyrus P⁷⁵, the earliest known (second century) manuscript of Luke, gives *Neues* as his name. Cyprian, in the third century, calls the man *Finaes*; Priscillian, in the fourth century and the Vulgate call him *Dives*, which simply means "rich" in Latin.

20. *a poor man named Lazarus*: The name Lazarus is 'el'etser in Hebrew (see Genesis 15:2), which has become *la'atser*, both of which mean "God helps."

26-31: The second part of the reading deals with the effect on faith of the miraculous.

25. *Child*: Though the rich man is in Hades Abraham still addresses him affectionately. *during your lifetime you received your good things, and Lazarus...evil things, but now he is comforted here, and you are in agony*: If there is a moral to be drawn here beyond the simple reversal of fortunes, it is that "it is not sufficient merely not to do evil and not

to do harm, but rather that one must be helpful and do good." [7]

I beg you to send him [Lazarus] to my father's house: Even at this point the rich man does not think of Lazarus as a person, but rather as a servant to be sent on an errand for the rich man.

31. *If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead:* "Not even the proverbial visitor from the dead would convince the elite to recognize the needs of the poor." [8] Neither does Jesus' resurrection have the power to create faith, if one does "not listen to Moses and the prophets," which directs us to "caring for the poor, not being greedy, and giving alms." [9]

Reflection

"The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith" (1 Timothy 6:10). Wealth and poverty, the rich and the poor, compensation and reversal of fortune as well as forgiveness and restoration are among the themes of this Sunday. Amos issued a powerful warning to those who sought wealth at the expense of the poor. They may have enjoyed being "first" in the enjoyment of luxury, but they will also be "first" in the exile! The Psalm praises Yahweh, who cares for the poor. Paul admonishes us to "pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness" rather than riches. And Jesus tells of the destiny of the rich man who neglected his duty to poor Lazarus.

In the Prayer of the Day we ask for God's grace, not to forgive us for our failings and frailties, but to overcome them. And specifically, to overcome our urge to become wealthy and our indifference toward those who have less than we.

Hymns [10]

With One Voice (e.g. 762v), *Hymnal Supplement 1991* (e.g. 725s) and *LBW* (e.g. 32).

E=Entrance; D=Hymn of the Day; I=First Lesson, P=Psalm; II=Second Lesson; G=Gospel

516 --E--Arise, My Soul
538 --D--Oh, Praise the
543 --P--Praise to the
792s --P--Thy Holy Wings (741v)

780v --P--What a Fellowship
779v --P--You Who Dwell
461 --II--Fight the Good Fight
447 --II--All Depends on
408, 482, 344, 494

Prayers of the People [11]

P or A: We rely on God for every breath, thought, and movement. Let us lift up the concerns of this congregation praying, "God of life and hope," and responding, "Hear our prayer."

A: That we might respect all living creatures, acknowledging your hand in all of creation. God, of life and hope. Hear...

A: That we who call on your name may be protected from the evils of this world by your sheltering wing. God of life and hope. Hear...

A: That we may learn to share our wealth with those who are in need. God of life and hope. Hear...

A: That those who are ill and in pain may be relieved of their suffering. We think especially of _____. God of life and hope. Hear...

A: That the children in our Sunday school may learn from your Word, and be open to its unfolding revelations, finding in their study guidance and truth. God of life and hope.

Hear...

P: Move our hearts, minds, and souls to greater reverence, that our prayers and our actions may be according to your will. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Or [12]

Presider or deacon

Let us be generous and ready to share with prayer for all the needs of the world.

Deacon or other leader

For *N* our bishop and *N* our presbyter, for this holy gathering, and for the people of God in every place.

For mercy, justice, and peace among all peoples.

For abundant fruits of the earth and for this good and bountiful world.

For our city and those who live in it and for our families, companions, and all those we love.

For the poor at our gates and for all those in desperate need.

For those who rest in Christ and for all the dead.

For pardon for all our transgressions.

Lifting our voices with all creation, with the blessed Virgin Mary Michael and all the angels, and all the saints, let us offer ourselves and one another to the living God through Christ. **To you, O Lord.**

Presider

God of Moses and the prophets, hear the prayers we offer this day and grant us belief through your Son risen from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Notes

The Scripture quotations contained herein are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U. S. A. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

[1] James Luther Mays, *Amos: A Commentary*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1969, p. 114.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 116.

[3] Hans Walter Wolff, *Joel and Amos: A Commentary on the Books of the Prophets Joel and Amos*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977, p. 277.

[4] Luke Timothy Johnson, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. New York: Doubleday, 2001, p. 294.

[5] Otto Michel, "homologeo", *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (ed. by Gerhard Friedrich), Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1967, Vol. 5, p. 211.

[6] Luke Timothy Johnson, *Ibid.*, p. 309.

[7] Martin Luther, *Luther's Works: American Edition*. vol. 51, p. 8.

[8] Bruce Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992, p. 378.

[9] Gerd Lüdemann, *Jesus after Two Thousand Years: What he really said and did*. Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 2001, p. 370.

[10] <http://www.worship.on.ca/text/rclc0001.txt>

[11] http://www.worship.on.ca/text/inter_c.txt

[12] <http://members.cox.net/oplater/prayer.htm>