

Proper 27
Year A

Amos 5:18-24
1 Thessalonians 4:13-18
Matthew 25: 1-13

It does not matter if you identify as a Republican, a Democrat, a Green, a Libertarian, or an independent; it does not matter if you agree with the platform and policies of the incoming administration; it does not even matter if you like or trust this country's President-elect; what happened on Tuesday night, the summation of years of effort, the election of Barak Obama to the presidency of the United States of America makes this a better country. Its got nothing to do with the inevitable shift in policies, or potential for repaired relations around the world, or a possible way out of the dung heap of our economy, or what might be a breath of fresh air brought in by new faces in our capitol's most tony offices... no, it is much more important than that. The 36.4 million of our countrymen and women with African ancestry awoke with a new light on the horizon on Wednesday. Generations of struggle against systematic racial oppression reached a symbolic zenith with the events of Tuesday. There is a potential like never before for voice being given to the voiceless. There is the possibility that millions of young people, black, white, brown, whatever, may begin to believe that change is actually possible. We, we being the white majority, might, oh pray that we do, just

might get a deeper appreciation of the power of difference, the imperative of diversity, the sin of a monolithic racial dominance of all high offices, public and private. The image, soon to be hung on the wall of every federal office across the world will be that of a black man. That is going to leave marks on all of us that we have been desperate for. Tuesday was a good day for our country, and the world.

Please don't think that I am up here being triumphant or partisan. Barack Obama was accused of being a socialist... and as more or less a socialist myself, his stuff doesn't stack up, he's too far from being an actual socialist to make me overly optimistic. And we better not think that the mere fact that a man of African origin was elected to the Presidency is the solution to one of the more sinister and pernicious afflictions on our society: racism. I am far, far from an authority on this subject, particularly being as white as I am, but I know enough to know that race, racism is a deeper scourge on each of our lives than I know that I can appreciate. This election is the outward and visible sign of change happening in our society. It is nothing more than that, but it is certainly nothing less.

What I am trying to say, possibly more dramatically than it needs to be said, is that this is a time for optimism; optimism with our eyes wide open.

Providence again, works its magic with the convergence of scripture on this morning, the first Feast of the Resurrection after election day. From the Prophet Amos we have a timely and stark warning, and from Matthew, we have Christ telling us a peculiar parable with a warning, similar in seriousness and timeliness.

Amos is warning us to beware what we hope for when it comes to the seriousness of God's presence. "Why do you want the day of the Lord? It is darkness, not light; as if someone fled a lion and was met by a bear." You make it safely home only to be bitten by a snake in your bed. Out of the pan and into the fire. The coming of God, or less dramatically the fulfillment of a great hope is probably not going to look like we think it will. Like we hope it will.

According to Amos, despises, hates, even, our festivals. Won't accept our offerings. Our songs are noise, God will not listen to our harps, "But let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an everflowing stream."

That happening is the day of the LORD come.

What does that all mean? Music is good. I'm not a big harp fan, but it shouldn't be dismissed out of hand. Hating festivals? What I think Amos is saying is that truly letting justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an everflowing stream changes everything. The things we find most comfortable, the places we feel most secure, the diversions that soothe us, the comfort foods we love, might, if not probably will change if not disappear in a world of true justice and righteousness. I can't imagine that a plate of fried clams and a beer at Michael's fits into the day of the LORD. Curling up on the couch and watching three episodes of the Wire won't be happening in a time of great justice and righteousness. Certainly no Happy Meals for the kids, trips to the Shaw's or Walmart, or Home Depot. Convenience is, for the most part, incompatible with real justice.

One of my favorite books is *The Dispossessed : An Ambiguous Utopia* by Ursula Le Guin. It is good science fiction about an anarchist/utopian movement that left Earth and settled a new planet where they established a society to the specifications of their values and morals from scratch. And it is hard. There are shortages. No one is comfortable, and there are cracks in the façade of their imagined utopia, surely, but everyone has enough, no one

is hungry or naked or sick without getting care. Power is shared. In short, justice is rampant. I think that probably is a realistic and admirable vision of utopia, one worth striving for. It is a vision of abundance, but not over-abundance. Plenty, but not too much. It is hard. Nothing about it is convenient. Nothing about it is comfortable. It ain't easy.

That is how I imagine our world could be. If our idea of justice is that everyone in the world lives to a standard of living equivalent to ours (materially at least), our world would buckle under the weight of our cars alone (we have 250 million here. A billion in China? 900 million in India?) We can't do that. We consume 25% of the world's resources for 5% of its population. We live in what we think is a prime rib world, and actually it is more like a rice and beans kind of place. There is enough rice and beans for everyone. Enough to have seconds. But as it is, a third of us are gorging on beef while the rest at least occasionally are not sure where the next meal is coming from. That is not OK.

So then, what does Christian justice look like? Maybe it looks a bit more like Amos had in mind than most of us, certainly me, are really comfortable with accepting let alone putting into practice. Ut-oh, I am going to say it,

maybe real justice looks a bit like redistributing wealth and resources in a more just, or at least equitable way. (I hope none here is running for president). I do not know that that is the answer, but it has got to be on the short list of a truly just and righteous world. That's serious. What are you willing to give up so that a child in Burma might not die of malaria for want of a mosquito net? What will you cut out of your routine to ensure that more schools in Haiti do not collapse? What is it that you actually need rather than simply want? If we are serious about justice, we have to be careful what we hope for when it comes to justice, the kind of justice that God sponsors, at least.

Then Jesus follows Amos' jab with a left hook saying that we had better pay attention to things or we will, like the bridesmaids who forgot to pack the oil, will be turned away into the outer darkness. The outer darkness? "I do not know you?" Jesus, say it ain't so. But he does say it is so. "Keep awake, for you know neither the day nor the hour."

Keep awake. Or for many of us, wake up. Awaken from our slumber in comfort. Awaken from the humdrumness or the frenetic business of every day. Awaken from the depression and anxiety and worry and compulsive

consumption that defines all of our worlds to some extent. We do not know what is coming next. We need to stay awake, like boy scouts, be prepared. We need to keep awake and keeping awake is very, very hard work, for keeping awake mostly means resisting the temptation to fall into our old habits. We need to mightily resist the temptation to look away from suffering, our own, our neighbors and from around the world. Keeping awake takes an effort each and every moment we are alive. It's got to start, now. Keep awake.

This whole economic conundrum we are in is the result of us desperately keeping the illusion of the prime rib world afloat through artificial means. We've convinced ourselves that the world could bear the weight of our consumption, and it just isn't feasible for all or even most. When real wealth wasn't sufficient to fill our pockets, houses and bellies with excess, artificial wealth, credit and debt, buoyed the economy. But greed got excessive, and that rubber raft of artificial wealth we have been clinging to began deflating. Keep awake and remember how to swim.

What Amos and Jesus are telling us is that justice requires sacrifice. We were never promised a rose garden. Its funny, I was in the Marines, and by

far the best Marine Corps advertisement I ever saw (meaning it kind of worked on me), was the photo of a Drill Instructor screaming into the face of a recruit and across the top it says “We never promised you a rose garden.” No they didn’t. And you know what, most of us really do not want it to be all easy. We do not need it to be easy. We are wholistic beings. We want it real, we need it to be real. We need it whole. Humans don’t need or want just the sugar coating, we’ve got to taste the whole donut. But it is not easy. It takes work. It is not a rose garden.

I heard a call in show on NPR on Thursday that took calls and had guests from all over the world getting their take on the election. It led off with Archbishop Desmond Tutu, and all of them, across the board said one thing: they sense the importance of this moment. Change is possible. I would be stating the obvious to say that change is inevitable, but it is. And it is not going to be easy. It is not going to be comfortable. It is not going to look like we might think or hope it will look. It is not going to be a rose garden, but justice just might start rolling and righteousness just might start flowing more than we have been accustomed to as of late. Keep awake. AMEN.