

ANGER, GRIEF, HOPE

Amos 5 & 9 Selected Readings

We have begun a new year. What will 2026 bring to us and to our world? How will what is happening in the world around us also affect us personally? And what will happen to us personally that will shape our outlook on our lives and our world? Do we live with hope? Or has our hope been shaken if not seriously damaged?

Well, let's begin with some honest questioning. Times are uncertain, fearful, difficult. What will happen in our trade relationship with the U.S and beyond? What will happen with various conflicts around the world? What will happen with our climate, global warming and more extreme weather-related events? What will happen with our more local challenges in terms of day to day living, affordability, health care needs and many other things besides? Times are uncertain, fearful and difficult.

And each of us is not in the same place in this regard either. Some of us are healthy enough and privileged enough that we can afford to turn away from the uncertainty and trouble because we have sufficiently reliable income, housing and even something extra for leisure pursuits, travel and other things too. Others of us are far more uncertain and vulnerable to the ups and downs of what is happening and what may happen to us and to the world around us.

But whatever our situation may be, we need to ask: how may we live with trust, with love and with hope in these difficult times? How can we find the courage to give and to serve, but also the resilience to believe in hope despite our fear?

Perhaps it is here that we can find some ancient wisdom to guide our present-day search for hope. The Hebrew prophet Amos lived a long time ago in a world very different than our own. And yet, for all the difference of his world compared to our own, the prophesy of Amos has much to say to us here and now too. Amos was called to be a prophet during the reign of a Hebrew King named Jeroboam. The years are 786-746 BC. It was a time of territorial expansion and prosperity for Israel. But who prospers and who does not? Who gains during expansion and who loses? What neglect and injustice may happen at the cost of expansion?

Think about our world today? Who are the winners and who are the losers? Those with power, privilege and money will always get richer. And for many of us who have all our needs met with something extra to enjoy, we're happy enough with things as they are. Sure, the world can get better, but if nothing changed, we'd still be ok. But others of us are desperate for change. Others of us hang on to hope for a better future, a future where good things will come to us,

our families and our communities anywhere they are in the world. But how can such a better future come if no one fights for something better?

And so it is for someone like Amos. Amos starts out as a farmer. He's doing ok for himself. But he also sees things around him and he sees how such things affect many who are being left behind. Something grows in him. It is anger and outrage. It grows in him because he cares. He loves, and in times of injustice, love rises up as anger and outrage too.

Much of Amos' prophecy and what he hears God speaking within him is judgement. And the judgement falls especially on those who commit injustice for the sake of greedy gain and profit. "Ah, you who turn justice to bitterness and bring righteousness to the ground!... You who afflict the righteous, who take a bribe and push aside the needy in the gate... Therefore because you trample on the poor and take from them levies of grain, you have built nice houses of hewn stone, but you shall not live in them; you have planted pleasant vineyards, but you shall not drink their wine. For I know how many your transgressions are and how great are your sins..."

Amos is prophesying judgement to fall on the nation beginning with those at the top, those who are benefitting from the expansion and are prepared to gain at the cost of many of their own people abused and neglected.

But what happens when judgement falls? The nation is invaded by a foreign power. All Hebrews suffer but those who suffer the most are those who have the least resources to survive an invasion. And those who invade are not interested in justice. They are driven by greed. They don't invade because they want to help Israel become fairer and more just for all people. No. They invade because they want the resources of the land, their crops and maybe their oil and minerals too?

Anyhow, what's the alternative to Amos' anger and outrage? How can we respond to all the trouble, all the unfairness and all the injustice in our world? We can become complacent in our privilege: "It doesn't affect me too directly so I'm going to turn away. I don't want to hear about it anymore. It's all too depressing."

Or, if we can't turn away because it affects us along with our family and friends more directly, we can feel hopeless and helpless to do much about it. Amos' anger and outrage is understandable, but is it not wasted energy? What will all the loud words and actions of protest accomplish? Isn't Amos better served by seeking more inner peace for himself?

Well, Amos, like many of the biblical prophets, invites us on a very important transformational journey. In Jesus' own patterning of it we can call it a death and resurrection journey. Jesus tells his followers to come follow him trusting that the dying is a prelude to resurrection, and resurrection is a new kind of life richer than anything you've had before even though it costs

you something of your heart and soul if not your life. Resurrection is always better even when there's some dying to happen in order to get there.

And for prophets like Amos, the dying comes in two steps. There is the anger and outrage. If you care shouldn't you feel some anger and outrage? Is not the bigger danger just numbing yourself or turning away if you can because it's too much to care or you feel helpless? How can we care enough to feel anger and outrage? How may anger and outrage be a healthy expression of emotion arising from a call of conscience and compassion that is not afraid to feel wherever such feeling may take us?

And yet, what happens if anger and outrage simply keep spinning in us without moving anywhere else? Anger and outrage can consume us and consume the people around us too. Anger and outrage can turn into bitterness, hate, revenge and contempt for people themselves beyond the systems of injustice they are a part of. Anger and outrage are important expressions for our humanity in search of greater justice. Imagine how much more terrible our world and our lives would be if there was no one getting angry enough to push for change toward greater justice. Imagine!

And yet, even as prophets like Amos fill up their prophecy with angry judgement and outrage as the voice of God, they also move from anger into what we may call grief, mourning and lament. Why? Because the same root caring that leads to anger and outrage also matures into feelings of sadness and sorrow. Prophets feel for the suffering of their people.

And once you open your heart to the suffering of your own people, your grief can also expand to feel the suffering in wider humanity, the suffering of mother nature too and all God's creatures. You can grow to feel grief and sorrow for even those who are enemies and even oppressors caught in systems of injustice that impose a winner and loser mechanism that leaves all people chewed up in the end. Oppressors who benefit in their sinful greed and hard-heartedness give up their consciences and their humanity. There is always a cost for everyone in an evil system where fear crushes love and violence tramples compassion and empathy. How may we find hope not only in feeling stronger in our humanity because we can feel anger and outrage in our caring, but also a grief and sorrow that can lament and weep, and a compassion that can offer those suffering a comfort deeper than our anger?

And so it is for prophets like Amos. From a privileged and satisfied farmer living a good and happy life away from the turmoil, Amos is awakened to the injustice in the world. The love in him grows as outrage and angry judgement. But after anger has had its full flowering in Amos, something else also grows in him: grief and sorrow, and we see this in little glimpses here and there in his prophecy. His grief and God's grief are co-mingled. And here, in the darkness of the loss and suffering of his people, Amos is also opened, miraculously, to the possibility of hope, hope in a resurrection.

Here's how Amos ends his prophecy:

"¹³The time is surely coming, says the Lord,
when the one who plows shall catch up with the one who reaps
and the treader of grapes with the one who sows the seed;
the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it.
¹⁴I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel,
and they shall rebuild the ruined cities and inhabit them;
they shall plant vineyards and drink their wine, and they shall make gardens and eat their fruit.
¹⁵I will plant them upon their land, and they shall never again be plucked up
out of the land that I have given them, says the Lord your God."

These words are a vision, a vision of restoration, but also a vision of something new: reconciliation. "The one who plows shall catch up with the one who reaps and the treader of grapes with the one who sows the seed." In other words, the resurrection hope is not in us getting back at our oppressor. No. Resurrection hope is in us seeing the other as a human being like us caught up in a system that is exploiting us all. And even beyond us human beings playing our war games, there is mother earth and her desire to be bountiful: "the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and the hills will flow with it." This is a vision of abundance for all. No need to compete or take from one another. There is abundance for all if we can become transformed in heart and soul, and begin to see each other as siblings rather than competitors.

OK, so how may I who may still be stuck in the anger and outrage or the grief and sorrow, step into this vision of resurrection hope and make it mine in some way?

I was 19 years old and early in my university years. I was given a job by a hospital porter. He was hired to care for an old man named Jack, living in a posh senior's residence. Jack needed personal care from morning to evening because he had suffered a massive stroke leaving him unable to do anything for himself. The porter offered me a little training and weekend shifts.

Jack had a rags to riches story. He had come to Canada with nothing and had made a fortune. He had built a whole company and had become a man of influence in the corporate world. But in the midst of his glory, he had suffered a massive stroke. He could barely speak. He couldn't feed or toilet himself. He needed total care. While control of his company and fortune had gone to his children, no one came to visit him. I heard that for all his success, Jack was a ruthless man and unkind to family and all who worked for him. But all I saw was a man totally vulnerable and in need.

Here I was a 19-year-old and I had him to myself 12 hours a day. The nurses and PSWs in his residence left much of his care through the day to me. I would get him up, dress him, toilet him, feed him. He was totally vulnerable to however I handled him. But I learned some basic

pastoral care with this man. From any potential anger and outrage I could have felt hearing from his adult children and other family about him, I grew to feel grief and sorrow for a man who had never had a chance to reconcile and become humanized with his family and relations. He was living his final years alone with strangers like me who had him 12 hours a day on weekends. Sure I was paid well, but this became far more than a job. How would I be Christ to this man? How would I discover my own personal hope seeing this man as a child of God?

This, my friends, is where we all need to land. Even as we can fall into the cycles of anger and outrage, grief and sorrow, may we also find our seasons of resurrection hope. For all the ups and downs of our world and our own personal lives, may we never forget to cultivate our call to love because only through love rising up in us is genuine hope to be felt, a hope that grows despite and beyond whatever outcomes may come in our lives and our world. Where true love is, God is among us seeking to enter open hearts despite so much selfish greed, indifference and ready violence in our world.

Do you feel such love? Do you feel the hope? Don't be afraid to get angry for the right reasons. Don't be afraid of your grief and your tears either. But don't be afraid to hope in wild visions of a better world where even enemies may become reconciled and the suffering may discover genuine comfort. Amen.