

Give ourselves to lives of righteousness in both our cosmic and commercial contexts.

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Sixth Sunday after Pentecost 2022 Amos 8:1-12, Psalm 52, Colossians 1:15 – 29, Luke 10:38 – 42

Sunday 17 July 2022

“Hear this, you who say, ‘We will make the ephah small and the shekel great, and practise deceit with false balances’” (Amos 8:5)

This is a verse we could well have quoted when some weeks ago, a neighbour left a note for us objecting to the Climate Change Now banner outside the Church. “I want climate change action,” he wrote, “but it is not the concern of the Church!”

Well, clearly, Amos the prophet, speaking God’s word to the people of Israel, would disagree: the dishonest dealing in the market-place, “buying the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals and selling the sweepings of the wheat” – this was just as much an affront to God’s righteousness and the integrity of God’s people, as was any hypocritical reliance on the externals of worship.

As we think about that little section of the prophet’s message, we see how the dealings in the market-place were placed in the context of cosmic events: “I will make the sun go down at noon, and darken the earth in broad daylight”. And within this connection between cosmic and commercial, the prophet identifies “a famine...of hearing the words of the

Lord.”

We find this connection also in the domestic setting in the Gospel reading, with Martha, the conscientious hostess being “distracted with much serving”, while Mary “sat at the Lord’s feet and listened to what he was saying”. It is easy for us to become “distracted”, particularly by the word “better” in the Lord’s answer to Martha’s complaint – in fact the adjective is not comparative at all, it is the word for “lovely”: “Mary has chosen the lovely part, which shall not be taken away from her” – clearly both the listening to God’s message, and the daily domestic duties were significant offerings to the Master.

When Saint Paul wrote to the Colossian Christians, he was concerned to stress this concern of God for *everything* in life. In the first paragraph of the reading from Colossians 1 that we heard this morning, Paul uses the word “all” over and over again. “In Christ *all things* in heaven and earth were created”, “in him *all things* hold together”, “through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself *all things*”. Through the cross, Jesus is making peace with *all things*.

What comes to mind for you when you hear “all things” in this context? Is it the amazing photos of far-off galaxies taken by the latest space telescope – are these among the “all things seen and unseen” of the Creator, and of him “through whom all things were made”? Or is your picture of “all things” one of land-forms, oceans and atmosphere –do we see that these geographical features can come to a state of peace through Christ? Perhaps “all things” for you conjures up pictures of the vast range of different plants or animals, not only surviving but thriving under the hand of the creator. What an amazing claim the writer is making – that it is in Christ that these mind-blowing collections of creatures find their place, their purpose, their peace! But of course “all things” does not only refer to the grand celestial scale, but the mundane as well – it includes the activities, the ideas,

the people that we deal with day by day, in what Amos would refer to as “the market-place” – the commercial as well as the cosmic!

Paul goes on from these exalted heights to talk directly to his Colossian readers, for these are clearly among the “all things” that he is singing about: “you ...he has reconciled”. It is the one who deals with “all things” who also deals with us, and presents us “holy and blameless and irreproachable before him”. He then draws on his own experience of suffering to point to his calling as an apostle of Christ’s reconciling work, and then directs his readers to “the riches of the glory of this mystery”, – and that word “mystery” might be better translated as “the revealed secret “ – these riches are “Christ in you, the hope of glory”. We move swiftly from inter-galactic space to the human heart!

Does that expression give you a warm feeling in *your* heart – that this amazing, creating, reconciling Christ is “in you, the hope of glory”? Perhaps the message of the Psalmist occurs to you, “What are we that you should be mindful of us:” he cries: “what are we that you should care for us?” The one whose glory is proclaimed by the heavens themselves, is in us, filling us with “the hope of glory”! Amazing!

But the warm feeling is all very well, but it should express itself in worship and praise, in the common life of the People of God, in our joining in the worship of the church. (Though all these things are motivated not simply from the warm feelings, but from deeper, more lasting convictions and from a faith that says, “no matter what I am feeling, God is true, God is love, God is calling me into relationship with him”.)

But whatever is motivating our being with the Church this morning as it offers worship and celebrates the Sacrament, the prophet makes it quite clear that even this activity is worthless unless it is done in the context of the integrity and honesty of our life in the daily activity of the market-

place. Earlier in his short book of prophecy Amos puts it most starkly, in the words of the God who called him to be a prophet, "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."

And what comes to your mind when you think of this justice, this righteousness? Is it in ecological crises that this rolling down needs to take place? Or is it in the warfare and civil strife that we see so starkly displayed in the news? Is it in climate change, in family violence, in employment conditions, in social security provisions, in political dealings, in racial relationships, in gender equality? Is it in some of these that we long to see justice and righteousness flowing? In all these areas and many more, God, the God who made, loves, reconciles *all things*, calls for "justice to roll down like waters", and calls us, in whom Christ lives, "the hope of glory", to give ourselves to lives of righteousness in both our cosmic and commercial contexts.

When, at the end of our liturgy, we respond to the Deacon's cry, "Go in peace to love and serve the Lord", we are committing ourselves to the pursuit of this justice, this reconciliation, this peace, this hope of glory! "In the name of Christ. Amen!"