



# Weekly Worship Resource for Gladsmuir and Longniddry

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Issue 67

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## Today's readings

### Amos 5:18-27 ("The Day of the Lord")

Alas for you who desire the day of the Lord!

Why do you want the day of the Lord?

It is darkness, not light;

as if someone fled from a lion,

and was met by a bear;

or went into the house and rested a hand against the wall,

and was bitten by a snake.

Is not the day of the Lord darkness, not light,

and gloom with no brightness in it?

I hate, I despise your festivals,

and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies.

Even though you offer me your burnt-offerings and grain-offerings,

I will not accept them;

and the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals

I will not look upon.

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.

Did you bring to me sacrifices and offerings the forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel? You shall take up Sakkuth your king, and Kaiwan your star-god, your images that you made for yourselves; therefore I will take you into exile beyond Damascus, says the Lord, whose name is the God of hosts. Amen. (NRSV)

## Today's hymns

- 1 *Lord of creation* (CH:500)
- 2 *Thy mercy, Lord, is in the heavens* (CH:28)
- 3 *Come, let us to the Lord* (CH:482)
- 4 *When I receive the peace of Christ* (CH:566)
- 5 *Let us with a gladsome mind* (CH:93; tune: Harts)

# In the Name of the Father and of

In the summer of 1982 I went on an overseas holiday for the very first time, travelling with my sister and her husband to the incredible other-world of Iceland. Of all the discoveries that boggled my mind in there, the stand-out moment for me came when we drove east out of Reykjavik, and made our way to the Seljalandsfoss waterfall.

Iceland is full of falls, but this one had something special in store. What made Seljalandsfoss a really great adventure was that you got to walk right up to it, and then walk right *behind* it. Honestly, I felt like I had become Tintin for the day ... and let me tell you: that's a really good feeling. Carefully treading our way around the slippery path we got to look out through a magical curtain of water to the desolate landscape beyond. Above all else, my great memory of that walk was feeling the pounding of the water – thousands upon thousands of gallons of the stuff – through the soles of my feet. That ... I had not expected.

Surprisingly, perhaps, in all the many pages of the News Revised Standard Version of the Bible, you will not find the word “waterfall”, although it comes close. In our reading from the book of the prophet Amos we hear what might perhaps be a slight echo of pounding waters: “... let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.”

The image of rolling waters of justice offers us a strong and compelling picture. It sends a message of something powerful and dynamic and immediate, as the waters of justice fall down from high above to bring their pounding energy to those who need it so badly. These waters are cleansing and refreshing, hydrating and rejuvenating. And, above all, they are waters sent by God to the people he loves: people whose lives are subject to oppression.

Amos is a prophet whose anger at hypocrisy is obvious. Speaking on behalf of God, he condemns the very things which religion seem to be about: festival days and gatherings; sacrifices and offerings; even worship and praise. No, says Amos. God wants none of these from you corrupt people. God wants you to live lives of outward-looking justice and righteousness, because that is what really counts.

The prophets of the Old Testament are often imagined as fortune tellers, warning kings that something terrible is going to come their way. We might be tempted to picture crystal balls or tealeaves or tarot cards, but to do so would be to get the whole thing drastically wrong. To be a prophet in the days before Christ was really to convey a message from God to the powerful ruling classes, in order to show a nation and its leaders that they had gone astray. The prophet would point out the consequences of current actions and prescribe repentance: turning right around to find God's better way.

Amos is what you would call a “minor prophet” as opposed to a “major prophet”. Once again, you need to get what's meant by that. There was no league table of prophets with the major ones doing well and those called minor lagging behind. The scale here is all to do with book length, so you end up with Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, and Daniel in the major category, and a further 12 (including Amos) being termed the minor prophets.

What was it that Amos did? Basically, he spoke out for God's justice during a period of prosperity. Why, you might very well ask, did God need a spokesperson to represent him when there was lots of wealth sloshing around? The answer is as old as the hills, yet as current as today's issue of *The Observer*. It all came down to human nature. Right through history, when times have been good there would be a very real danger of the rich getting obscenely wealthy while the poor would find themselves getting mired down in poverty.

# the Son and of the Holy Spirit . . .

The American writer Talitha Arnold (whose Bible studies are familiar to Longniddry's study groups) reports that Amos was a key biblical source for Martin Luther King in his struggle for justice in the United States. Perhaps most famously, in his 1963 letter from a jail cell in Birmingham, Alabama, Dr King employed Amos's phrase "let justice roll down like waters" to address the abject failure of the Southern church leaders to engage with the Civil Rights movement.

King could see how America after the Second World War was beginning to thrive, with a standard of living that was rising rapidly, and with industry, commerce, farming, technology, the media and the arts all making the USA the very beacon of modern civilisation. Still, millions of others had no share in this affluent society and in many places found it well nigh impossible even to register for their vote. And this, not 60 years ago.

In his cell the Great Civil rights leader must have been struck by the similarities to be drawn between the insights of Amos, and his own personal experience. Each of these prophetic figures could touch the sad inequalities in their societies. Each could feel in the depths of their being the division between rich and poor. Respectable society embodied a lie – and a very profound blasphemy. As Talitha Arnold so powerfully comments on Amos's words: *... prosperity and peace were just a veneer over the abyss between rich and poor, as the righteous were "sold for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals."*

Whether 3000 years ago or in our modern world, economic division is very real. Amos knew it. King knew it. And in our heart of hearts we know it too.

A couple of weeks back in church we passed on a message from the Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, Jim Wallace, a church elder who cares passionately about justice in our time. Here's what he says about working with Christian Aid to play our part in the global push towards full, global pandemic vaccination: *... we are urging the UK Government to do all that it can to ensure COVID-19 vaccines are available throughout the world. Alongside this we must also seek to limit the impact of the virus on health, livelihoods, and personal safety, for those in the poorest parts of the world. By supporting Christian Aid in their efforts to provide basics such as soap, water, and food, we can ensure that vulnerable communities stay safer as they wait for vaccination. In this very tangible way, as we seek global justice, here is a practical opportunity to give real expression in 2021 to loving our global neighbours.*

How might we take this further? Well, this autumn I hope we will participate in the Church of Scotland's "National Giving Day", through which we might give from our wallets and purses and bank accounts to help the Moderator to help Christian Aid to fight for both Covid safety and, ultimately, vaccine justice. We can help vulnerable people stay safe as they wait for their vaccines, and that safety doesn't need to cost much: clean water; hygiene kits; PPE; toilet blocks (the kind of things they should have already!). These are basic steps which will make a huge difference in under-resourced countries. More news, I hope, will follow on this soon from our kirk session.

In our country we love our NHS, and rightly so. It gives and gives, supporting rich and poor alike, meaning that we know our healthcare needs will be met from state revenues. That truly is something to be celebrated. What Lord Wallace wants us to do is to show our humble and grateful thanksgiving by helping vaccine justice to "roll on like waters". In such a way we can make real our desire to see global protection advance "like an ever-flowing stream". Is that too much to ask for? Is that not a most wonderful goal in our time? Amen.

# Praying for others

Lord of the seasons,  
we have just passed the midsummer solstice,  
the sun is high above us, making all things grow and bloom.  
The smell of green new life abounds, and we see your hand continually  
upholding creation as season gives way to season, and year succeeds to year.

We pray for those who feel still in the middle of winter,  
for those who feel life has little to offer, lonely and alone,  
those who are homeless, weary, wandering nowhere.  
Help us to be a light and solstice to those who are searching.  
Inspire us to build up a community where all find home and acceptance.

We pray for those who are ill:  
may you bring your healing light and warmth in their time of vulnerability.  
And finally, we pray for those who are coming to the evening of their life:  
may they have the assurance that you are with them,  
and will lead them to their eternal midsummer where there is but one equal light and peace.  
These things we ask through our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of light. Amen.

## And finally . . .

*Abigail Morrison considers the 2021 Faith Impact report and its impact on climate change:*  
There are various committees which report the General Assembly every year but one of the “biggest” is one of the newest – the Faith Impact Forum. They look at the area their name describes – how our faith can make an impact in the world. Their report to the 2021 General Assembly covered a remarkable range of issues, including climate change.

The Forum is developing a strategy to achieve Net Zero by 2030. Net Zero refers to achieving a balance between the amount of greenhouse gas emissions produced and the amount removed from the atmosphere. There are two different routes to achieving net zero, which work in tandem: reducing existing emissions and actively removing greenhouse gases. The Forum has proposed five goals with some suggested actions:

**Reduce CO2 emission from buildings.** Actions: establish current baselines, monitor and reduce energy use, green supply of energy, gradual switch to renewable heat sources;

**Reduce activities’ carbon footprint.** Actions: sustainable procurement, reduction in food waste, low emission travel, electrical vehicle charging at church properties;

**Compensate for emissions.** Actions: establish church carbon stock on lands, investigate off-setting unavoidable emissions;

**Play an active role as a social actor and debater.** Actions: whole church engagement in climate justice and responsibilities, and witness to society and political processes.

**Climate engagement.** Actions: All parts of the Church devote adequate resources to do the work necessary to implement changes to achieve the goals.

I think this a helpful starting point for our congregation, and for us as individuals, to consider what we can do to move to Net Zero. The Session, with its Eco-congregation working group, will continue to work towards this goal.