

We are doing something a bit different today: we are using the second reading from Colossians in place of our Creed. This gorgeous passage is a hymn that people would have sung in the first years of Christian community in and around Palestine and Asia Minor. I think that it absolutely rips with mystic bliss and beauty, and it is definitely one that I go to when I need to be reminded about who God is. It's a really spiritually nourishing thing for us as a community to be reminded about who God is together with these familiar yet fresh words. It sounds at first like it is in direct contrast to the words of Amos, who torches the ears of his listeners with his prophetic words! But there is a really beautiful connection between them that speaks so powerfully to the truth of God's love in Jesus being at the centre of life itself.

Today we are going to spend some time meditating on the beauty, and fullness, and completeness of this God, and what this deep beauty has to do with how God enacts justice and mercy. These readings speak right into our present times. So, let's listen to what they have to say about being in relationship with a God who is at the centre of all that is created, and who is loving it into life and healing. The hymn in Colossians tells us about how God's Spirit doesn't just drench creation but is in fact the very wellspring from which all creation comes.

What does it even mean that the cross of Jesus is at the centre of all that has been, is now, and is yet to come? **God's self-giving is at the centre of all that is. That the kingdom of God is built not because of a divine triumph over or conquest of evil, but through the simple truth that God simply cannot not give God's self away.** God's nature is one of endless giving, endless mercy, endless healing, and invitation to relationship to discover what it is like to experience these things with God.

Our reading from Amos reminds us that God's justice and mercy are an essential part of this divine self-giving. That may sound strange as it is such a stark and painful reading. It's impossible to hear it and not think of everything that is happening right now. This psalm could have been written about Trump. We'll stick with the Amos reading because there's enough in there to occupy us without even getting through the whole thing.

Most of us don't really know much about Amos, much less the function of a prophet. Amos was a shepherd who didn't want to be called out from his work to call the powers that be to account. Amos lived in a time of extreme economic oppression, when the poorest in society were exploited in order so that the rich could increase their wealth and consolidate their power. Religious institutions had sold out and were in league with the rich and powerful. It's into this milieu that Amos proclaims his fire-y prophetic words of judgement.

I find it impossible to read the Hebrew Scriptures and not think of what is happening in the world. I know many of us are bewildered and angry or scared about how we got to this place, as we watch what is happening in the middle east. We watch children and families who have nothing to do with this war die – each one of these people a universe, unique, a marvel – and our hearts break over and over again.

So we are going to take the second part of our Amos reading here, and have in our vision the truth we will proclaim in a few moments of God's self-giving in Jesus. We here these powerful words of judgement and we are also about to confess that we believe that Jesus takes on the pain of the world and transforms it. Listen to what Amos says and consider what other day it might remind you of: "On that day, says the Lord God, I will make the sun go down at noon and darken the earth in broad daylight. I will turn your feasts into mourning and all your songs into lamentations. I will make it like the mourning for an only son and the end of it like a bitter day. The time is surely coming, says the Lord God, when I will send a famine on the land not a famine of bread or a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord.". If you are thinking Good Friday, you are spot on. Who lost a son? God. A famine of hearing the words of the Lord: "my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?".

For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.

If your soul is weary, spend time with this reading from Colossians this week. Read it every morning. Because this reading tells us something most beautiful about Jesus: that he absorbs all the pain and violence and suffering in this world, and is absorbing it, even while being infinitely more powerful than it. Consider what the peace of the cross is in your life and in the world. Consider what response this calls out of you. Maybe gratitude, maybe action, maybe creativity in some way. Spend some time with this God.