CHRIST CHURCH CRANBROOK

Let Justice Roll

Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour. The Gospel of the Lord: Praise to you Justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

“Give me oil in my lamp, keep me burning, burning, burning. Give me oil in my lamp, I pray. Give me oil in my lamp, keep me burning, burning, burning. Keep me burning till the break of day.” These are words from a song that many of us learned in Sunday school. In it, we ask God to keep our lamps burning so that we can stay awake for Jesus. For soon, a new day will dawn. Soon, God will set us free. In more exalted language, we sang about that same day in our sequence hymn, a beloved Advent hymn, "Forth He Comes, Her Bridegroom Glorious, In Strength of Grace, In Truth Victorious." These words always bring me to tears.

Often, the scriptures speak to us about the coming day of the Lord, and depending on where we sit and what we stand for, that day can terrify us, or else it can give us hope. Today's lesson from Amos does both at the same time. With regard to terror, the prophet tells us that the day of the Lord is darkness and not light. It is as if someone fled from a lion, he says, and was met by a bear. The very same moment, however, for all its terrifying fury, the day of the Lord is a source of hope and consolation, for that day brings us face to face with the Holy One. In strength of grace, in truth victorious, God acts with a sure and certain love for us all. God is acting even now to create a world where all are beloved, where all are welcomed and transformed. God's love is neither weak nor sentimental. It is stronger than bombs and bullets and prisons. It is far, far stronger than all the things we think are strong.

I say this on the weekend before Veterans Day, when we remember the armistice that brought the First World War to an end. I say it as we remember the brave souls that fought to fight the, to rid the world of fascism, and I say it in grateful remembrance of those who have served in many conflicts since. They know in ways that nobody else

does the true costs of war. In their bodies, they know the urgency of God's cries for peace. God has no patience for our violence and contempt for other people. God makes no excuses for our failures to love. God is the author of life and the giver of peace. In words written in the Torah, in the 16th chapter of Deuteronomy, God says, "Justice, only justice you shall pursue." Or as the prophet Amos says to us this morning, "Unless our worship leads to justice and mercy, it is a waste of time. Take away from me the noise of your songs," says the Lord. "I will not listen to the melody of your harps. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream." This last phrase should be familiar to us. Not only do we find it on the lips of Amos, but we also hear it from the greatest American prophet.

Throughout his ministry, Dr. Martin Luther King appealed to these words. King used them to confront a church complicit in the original sins of our nation, the violence of racism, dispossession of native peoples, and white supremacy. King saw his fellow Christians oppressing his own people as well as poor people from every tribe, every language, every nation. In 1963, King appealed to the fifth chapter of Amos at the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. It was the *I Have a Dream* speech.

Throughout the latter years of his ministry, he turned to these same words again and again. He even quoted them in his *Mountaintop* speech on the night before he died. King had gone to Memphis to support striking sanitation workers. They faced a court order against a march and demonstration they had planned. As he often did, King invoked both the biblical prophets and our highest ideals as a nation. "Now, about injunctions," he said to the crowd, "We have an injunction, and we're going into court tomorrow morning to fight this illegal, unconstitutional injunction." All we say to America is be true to what you said on paper. If I lived in China or even Russia," he said, "or any totalitarian country, maybe I could understand some of these illegal injunctions. Maybe I could understand the denial of certain basic First Amendment rights because they hadn't committed themselves to that over there. But somewhere I read of the freedom of assembly. Somewhere I read of the freedom of speech. Somewhere I read of the freedom of the press. Somewhere I read that the greatness of America is the right to protest for right. And so, just as I say, we aren't going to let dogs or water hoses turn us around. We aren't going to let any injunction turn us around. We are going on. Somehow," he continued, "the preacher must be an Amos and saith, "When God speaks, who can but prophesy?" Again with Amos, "Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream. Somehow the preacher

must say with Jesus, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because He hath anointed me, and He's anointed me to deal with the problems of the poor."

It's all right to talk about long white robes over yonder in all of its symbolism, but ultimately people want some suits and dresses and shoes to wear down here. It's all right to talk about streets flowing with milk and honey, but God has commanded us to be concerned about the slums down here and His children who can't eat three square meals a day. It's all right to talk about the new Jerusalem, but one day God's preacher must talk about the new New York, the new Atlanta, the new Philadelphia, and the new Los Angeles, and the new Memphis, Tennessee. This is what we have to do.

Like many prophets before him, King spoke with the fire of God in his bones. He spoke by the fire that burns in the heart of Jesus. He spoke with the fire we sing about in Sunday school. Toward the end of the year, the nights grow longer. Sometimes they grow dark and cold. Have you noticed? The lessons we hear about in church call us to repent. They call us to turn our lives around, to keep hope alive, to light the fire of Jesus, and keep it burning in our hearts. Sometimes we find ourselves in a spiritual winter. Sometimes God seems so far away. Our hope grows dim. Our love grows cold. We wander far away from God, far away from each other.

But soon, we will enter the season of Advent, and as we do so, we will hear the mighty promises of God. We will hear about springs of water in dry places. We will hear about the deserts breaking out into bloom. We will hear about the royal highway that God is building even now to bring us, captive sinners, home. Soon our Savior is coming. He is faithful. He is strong to save; God's promises to us are true. They are true not just for Jerusalem, but for every city, every town, every neighborhood. God's promises are true for every nation under heaven. The day of the Lord is coming, right here, right now.

God is making a new New York. God is making a new Atlanta, a new Philadelphia, a new Los Angeles. God is making a new Washington and a new Detroit. From the fields of Mississippi to the hills of Appalachia, from the Rust Belt to the Rio Grande, God is making a world where everyone has enough to eat and a decent place to live. Even here, even now, God is making all things new. The living God, the Holy One of Israel and our Redeemer, is calling us to cast away the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. We need to keep our lamps burning in a world that wants to extinguish them.

Let Justice Roll - The Twenty Fourth Sunday After Pentecost 11/8/26

We live in a world that tries to pull us in the opposite direction. We live in a world where we give our allegiance to other gods, where we give our hearts to other masters. Often they are malevolent and fallen powers. We need to stay awake in Jesus and His love. We heard it last Sunday when Jesus Himself spoke to us from the mountaintop. "Blessed are the poor," He said. "Blessed are the merciful. Blessed are the peacemakers. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness." Here, Jesus is speaking to us as one of the prophets. He is speaking to us about God's never-failing mercy and love. He is speaking a sure and certain word of salvation. He is speaking a word that brings about the kingdom. But more than that, Jesus is not just a prophet. He is Himself the very Word of God, for in Him, the Word becomes flesh. In Him, God's truth and God's salvation have moved into the neighborhood.

As our Lord and Savior, Jesus invites us to get in on the blessings of the kingdom, and we are to do so now while we still have breath and time. Next week, on Sunday, we will celebrate the Feast of Christ the King. People of all nations, including this one, will stand before the great judgment seat of Christ, and we will ask him, we will say to the one we claim as our Lord and Savior, "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food? Or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you? Or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?" And our Lord will say to us, "Truly, as you did it to one of the least of these, who are members of my family, you did it to me." Jesus shows us how to give each other mercy. He shows us how to love each other in this world. He shows us how to do justice to the neighbors we have from Him.

Love is the only way. It is the only way we can counteract the violence and divisions we see everywhere today. The future of our country, and of all nations everywhere, depends on the love that Jesus brings us. He came to set us free from the ways of sin and death. He came to show us how to love each other. He came to give us power to live as God's children. And that, beloved, that is why we gather here today. We come to God needing healing and spiritual renewal. Day by day, in a world that lives by different values, we need to be renewed in God's love.

We need oil for our lamps. We need the living Spirit of Jesus. May His Spirit burn ever more brightly among us. May we love our neighbors, every last one of them, ardently. May we love them with the love that conquers death. Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness, righteousness, like an ever-flowing stream.

Amen.