

Amos is a working class guy. He is from the southern kingdom of Judah speaking to the northern kingdom of Israel. He was outside looking in. Maybe we could imagine a voice from the outside, someone from the global south, maybe a person from Mexico or El Salvador. What would they see? Would it sound anything like Amos?

What is injustice according to Amos? In 2:7 Amos says, “In Israel they sell the righteous for a piece of silver and the needy for a pair of sandals.” In ancient Israel slavery was an economic condition—they would force people into slavery for a very small debt. Amos also talks about violence against women and other mistreatments of the poor. Amos says, “they’re lying down on pledged blankets next to God’s altar.” A pledge is something given to assure a debt will be paid, it is collateral. In the Bible it says a blanket taken in pledge must be returned by nightfall. The poor, they need their blanket to sleep and the Bible required that it be given back, but Amos says they are piling up the poor peoples’ blankets and using them for mattresses to sleep. They are sacrificing the poor people’s need for warmth to satisfy their wants for a comfortable bed. And then they wake up well rested and worship God.

Last Wednesday at the Peaceful Nights dinner I sat and talked with Janelle Leppa. Janelle works for Simpson Housing directing their Family Housing programs. To better understand what that means I asked her, “What did you do today?” She responded with a story and I asked her to share that story today.

Janelle: Wednesday we were working with a woman, I’ll call her Karen and last month her sister, that lived out of state, was killed by her boyfriend. So Karen needed to make a couple of trips to help get her sister’s children in a new home. The trips

used up the money she needed for rent. Her next paycheck was coming on Friday but her landlord was going to evict her Wednesday. We went back and forth with the landlord advocating on behalf of this woman; so she wouldn’t get evicted. It is often hard to understand if would cost the landlord about \$500 to file the eviction, about what she owed him for her portion, but he wasn’t willing to wait two days. In the end Simpson Housing paid the money—she is still in her home.

Kjell: Recently I’ve heard about how there is such a small margin for error for people working at or near minimum wage \$9.50/hr. Will you share a story about someone that is fully employed and what they have to do?

Janelle: Friday morning I was trying to work out a plan for a young mom in our program to pay her full portion of rent once our subsidy times out in January. In the best of circumstances (her kids don’t get sick and she can make it to work every day), her pre-tax wage is \$1,600 a month. Once our subsidy ends in December, she will need to pay \$950.00 of that for rent, plus utilities, plus transportation, clothing and food needs beyond what SNAP provides, not to mention things like tooth paste or a child’s birthday gift. The challenge we were trying to work through Friday is that she is due with her second child in December and her job doesn’t offer any maternity leave benefits. She wants to return to work after just 3 weeks in order to make ends meet, however her childcare isn’t able to take children until they are 6 weeks. She is absolutely determined to prevent her family from going back to shelter, but neither her advocate or I can see how the math is going to work. Her plan is to pretend that our subsidy ends in December and pay every dollar she can towards her rent so she will have a rent credit to

go towards January. Besides prayer, I am feeling at a loss for what February will bring for her.

Kjell: Janelle thank you for sharing your stories and the work you do that provides people with warm places to sleep and live. Where is the Good News in Amos? This is a wonderfully powerful message of God's love for the poor and taken advantage of. When you read Amos, and really in all of scripture, we see over and over again God calling for economic justice. Jesus siding with the poor and the beaten down; with those who have less and are struggling to get by. Jesus reaches out to those whose prayer, "give us this day our daily bread," requires faith because they don't know from where their next meal will come. The gospel, the good news of Amos is also a powerful motivator for those of us that have been lucky enough to be born in to the "right" country and neighborhoods and lucky enough to be born into families that had enough resources financially, emotionally, environmentally and educationally to give us a firm foundation and a safety net to fall back on. And the Bible say in Luke 24:48, "To whom much is given much is required." What is God calling us to be about?

Would you please flip to the front of your bulletin: "**Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.**" What might that look like? Three things: learn, advocate and give. We need to learn more about the injustices of our communities and world and then advocate for our elected officials to create just policies allowing for righteousness in our relationships the creation and our local/global brothers and sisters. We also need to give. We give of our time and money as individuals and as a congregation: building homes in the Dominican Republic, educating girls in

Africa and working with Interfaith Outreach to provide food, housing, job and education assistance in our own backyard.

Are we perfect? No! We are making progress? We are participating with God in the mission of bringing about a kingdom where **justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream**—this calling is so close to us because these are the waters of our baptism. Today Benjamin is going to be changed in these waters—these baptismal waters saturate us with the love of God, as Christians we are dripping with God's grace telling we are love and enough. But these waters also give us a thirst—a thirst for justice and righteousness. God gives us the power to stand up for what is right. God gives us the passion to show up at the meetings and rallies and politicians offices. God's love comes to us and flows through us—spilling out of us into our world letting **justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever flowing stream.** Amen.