**Wednesday 11th November 2020 Armistice Day Reading: Amos 5:18-24**

Today we look at Amos, another of the ‘minor’ prophets (so called because their ‘books’ were short).

When God gave Moses the 10 commandments, He also renewed his covenant with the children of Israel that He had made with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. (Jacob’s name was changed to Israel after he wrestled with God all one night – Genesis 32:28)

The form of the covenant God gave Moses was just like all the covenants found in the Ancient Near East – and always included the benefits that would be received if they kept the promises they made; and the consequences of failing to keep them. (Deuteronomy 28:1-14 – Blessings for obedience and in the rest of the chapter curses for disobedience – in particular verses 36-37, 45-52 and 64-68)

This was intended to be read every year as a memorial but, unfortunately the people of Israel had a succession of Kings who led them astray and ignored or forgot these words and instituted their own ideas. As things went from bad to worse God sent a succession of prophets to warn his people of what would happen if they continued on this path. (Amos 3:7 – Surely the Sovereign Lord does nothing without revealing His plans to His servants the prophets)

Amos, a shepherd living near Bethlehem – in the Southern Kingdom of Judea, was sent to the Northern Kingdom to warn them of impending exile if they did not mend their ways (40 years later, having ignored his warning, they were conquered by the Assyrians who totally uprooted them).

The people of Israel had become very complacent, dwelling in prosperity (as forecast by the prophet Elisha) but complacency had led to corruption and a misguided assumption that they could do no wrong, and God would always rescue them whatever happened. They assumed the ‘Day of the Lord’ they were waiting for would be one of celebration, and that all that was required of them was to observe the rituals of sacrifice – but Amos was sent to starkly warn them otherwise!

Has today’s society, like the children of Israel, become complacent and in danger of ‘resting on our laurels’? Do we assume things will always be the same? Is our worship borne out by the way we live, or do we sometimes just ‘go through the motions’? Do our actions, or lack of them, harm other people – directly or indirectly? I think, for many people, the pandemic has been a ‘wake-up call’ call’ to the world to ‘turn our swords into ploughshares and our spears into pruning hooks’ (Isaiah 2:4). A wake-up call to learn to work together – as families, as communities, as nations – to make this world the place God intended it to be, a place where trust in God, and love for Him flows into every part of our lives so that we truly begin to love our neighbour as ourselves.

Amos brought God’s message that without social justice, worship was meaningless. As we remember today those who gave their lives that we might be free – may we never take for granted how we have benefitted from their sacrifice, and turn thankfulness into action.

**Prayers:**

* Lord, show us how we can do our part in bringing about your Kingdom here on earth.
* For all those struggling with mental illness, fear and anxiety. Lord, bring your peace.
* For all those on the front line of research and care for the sick. Lord, protect them.
* For all in authority. Lord, give them your wisdom.
* For all those we love and care for. Lord, surround them with your love and power.

I think Amos’ message is well summed up in this Graham Kendrick song:

O Lord, the clouds are gathering
The fire of judgment burns
How we have fallen!
O Lord, you stand appalled to see
Your laws of love so scorned
And lives so broken

*Have mercy, Lord,
Forgive us, Lord,
Restore us, Lord
Revive your church again
Let justice flow Like rivers*

*And righteousness like a never-failing stream.*

O Lord, over the nations now
Where is the dove of peace?
Her wings are broken
O Lord, while precious children starve
The tools of war increase
Their bread is stolen.

O Lord, dark powers are poised to flood
Our streets with hate and fear
We must awaken!
O Lord, let love reclaim the lives
That sin would sweep away
And let your kingdom come

Yet, O Lord, your glorious cross shall tower
Triumphant in this land
Evil confounding
Through the fire your suffering church display
The glories of her Christ
Praises resounding!

*Have mercy, Lord,
Forgive us, Lord,
Restore us, Lord
Revive your church again
Let justice flow Like rivers*

*And righteousness like a never-failing stream.*

