**Standing up for justice like Amos**

*“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.”* **Amos 5:21-24**

Amos was a shepherd from Tekoa, a wilderness area to the south of Jerusalem, on the way the Dead Sea. The opening verses of the book of Amos tell us he was called as a prophet when Uzziah was king of Judah and Jeroboam was king of Israel. This is the time of the divided kingdom and the book also helps to narrow down further when he was a prophet by telling us that it was two years before an earthquake.

Amos was a prophet from the southern kingdom of Judah but prophesied to the northern kingdom of Israel. He was a prophet between 760-755BC. He was around at the same time as Hosea and Isaiah, which can be seen in that they have some similar themes – particularly the theme of justice.

This passage from Amos 5 is God speaking judgement against Israel, with these few verses seeming very harsh. God proclaims that their festivals and rituals do not bring God pleasure, that God won’t accept their offerings and sacrifices. God doesn’t want to hear their singing and music. Amos was telling them that all their religious acts of worship were not pleasing to God.

Q – What things about the worship life of your church may not be pleasing to God?

Q – Why might they not please God? (It is not because you may not like them)

Amos isn’t necessarily saying that their worship and their offerings are pointless or silly, but rather that they are hollow. They don’t upset God because they don’t sing well or their liturgy isn’t wonderful, but because what they say and what they do doesn’t match. Worship is important, but not if it is only once a week or when they need something – worship should be their whole life.

Amos then goes on to tell them what God does want – God wants justice and righteousness. God doesn’t want us to just worship and pray, God wants us to live a life worthy of God – a life of justice and righteousness. To live with justice – a life that is fair, that treats everyone equally and with respect. To lie a righteous life – one that is moral, good and justifiable – not a self-righteous life – thinking of others as well as ourselves.

Q – Is there anything in your life or the life of your church, which is not a life of justice or righteousness?

Q – What should you/we do about this?

This week there has been a lot in the news about racial justice, raised by the death of George Floyd in the USA. The world is full of injustices – sexism, racism, injustice towards those of different cultures, races, abilities, gender identities; as well as injustice towards the planet through climate change, deforestation, biodiversity loss and much more. With all this injustice it is easy to become disheartened, but we can choose one or two issues to stand up against. There are many ways to stand against injustice – writing letters, protesting, making changes to our lives and many more.

Q – Which issues of injustice are closest to your heart?

Q – How are you going to stand against this injustice?

Q – Which issues might your church want to stand against?

Q – How might your church stand against this injustice?