

Reflection

**July 1, 2020**

Amos 5; 14-15,21-24

PS 50

Matthew 8: 28 – 34

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The prophet Amos tells us today to “seek good and not evil, that you may live.” Then he goes on to take *apart* what seems to be good: sacrifices, worship, prayer. Those are not good enough in themselves. Something else is needed. What is that something else? Later, Amos urges us to “Let justice surge like water.”

Justice. Is justice the key? What kind of justice? We are hearing a lot about justice in the news these days. Is justice so clear? Some people today in our country are losing confidence in the justice system. We are becoming aware that a person’s personal beliefs and value system determines what they consider justice. We cannot depend on agreed upon values. If I see things differently, the outcome does not serve my sense of justice. Isn’t there objectivity that determines justice?

Let’s look at what happened in today’s Gospel. Jesus meets two men coming out of the nearby tombs. They are possessed by demons who immediately confront the overwhelming power of Jesus, especially the power to heal, to bring life, to liberate those two men from their own powerlessness. The demons fear Jesus. They plead with him to let them go into the swine, the pigs grazing on the hillside. Jesus says, “go then!” Go into them.

The two men are free at last, but how does the community react? The swine herders are not happy when the swine go down the hillside and all the swine drown in the lake. They are going to be blamed. There is no justice, they would claim. They are now *blind* to the two men who were possessed by the demons and the liberation Jesus brings.

Matthew tells us that the “whole town came out to meet Jesus and they begged him to leave their district.” What is happening here? Did they not care that Jesus healed the two men, freed them from their bondage? The change was too uncomfortable, too costly. They lost something valuable to them, probably their source of income. It was easier to live with the evil of those possessed.

Our country is in a messy time. Yes, we want to undo racism, but that can create chaos in the lives of the previously privileged.

A year or so ago, I was talking to a friend, a former co-worker in South Africa who led our Christian Formation Commission in the diocese. He and his wife had three children. We worked together when the last two were born; now all three were in college. They struggled greatly trying to make ends meet financially. Even though the children were excellent students, top of their classes, scholarships were not open to them; affirmative action for Blacks meant white privileges were gone. They could not even be considered. Many white families in South Africa left the country for Australia, Ireland, New Zealand. Those who stayed had to keep choosing the values they lived by. Did they truly believe in justice? Did they choose to empower the underprivileged of society and stay with them? Were they willing to live with less than they could have somewhere else?

The privileged in our American society today are our families, our friends, us. We will not have the advantages we once had. The movement to “defund police departments” is frightening until a new system is in place. Some communities will be tempted to take steps backwards when it seems they have gone too far and are being taken advantage of. It is messy. Letting justice “surge like water” comes at a price.

We need to be claiming our real values – the quality of life that everyone deserves. We need to keep our vision before us. We need the face of Christ before us, the mercy, the compassion, the justice that God call us to in the everyday practical situations of our lives.

How is God calling me let go, to be merciful, to be compassionate today? That is our true worship that Amos speaks about: justice that surges like water.