

**Amos 9:1 - Obadiah 1:1** I saw the Lord standing by the altar, and he said: "Strike the tops of the pillars so that the thresholds shake. Bring them down on the heads of all the people; those who are left I will kill with the sword. Not one will get away, none will escape. <sup>2</sup> Though they dig down to the depths of the grave, {2 Hebrew to Sheol} from there my hand will take them. Though they climb up to the heavens, from there I will bring them down. <sup>3</sup> Though they hide themselves on the top of Carmel, there I will hunt them down and seize them. Though they hide from me at the bottom of the sea, there I will command the serpent to bite them. <sup>4</sup> Though they are driven into exile by their enemies, there I will command the sword to slay them. I will fix my eyes upon them for evil and not for good." <sup>5</sup> The Lord, the LORD Almighty, he who touches the earth and it melts, and all who live in it mourn-- the whole land rises like the Nile, then sinks like the river of Egypt-- <sup>6</sup> he who builds his lofty palace {6 The meaning of the Hebrew for this phrase is uncertain.} in the heavens and sets its foundation {6 The meaning of the Hebrew for this word is uncertain.} on the earth, who calls for the waters of the sea and pours them out over the face of the land-- the LORD is his name. <sup>7</sup> "Are not you Israelites the same to me as the Cushites?" {7 That is, people from the upper Nile region} declares the LORD. "Did I not bring Israel up from Egypt, the Philistines from Caphtor {7 That is, Crete} and the Arameans from Kir? <sup>8</sup> "Surely the eyes of the Sovereign LORD are on the sinful kingdom. I will destroy it from the face of the earth-- yet I will not totally destroy the house of Jacob," declares the LORD. <sup>9</sup> "For I will give the command, and I will shake the house of Israel among all the nations as grain is shaken in a sieve, and not a pebble will reach the ground. <sup>10</sup> All the sinners among my people will die by the sword, all those who say, 'Disaster will not overtake or meet us.' <sup>11</sup> "In that day I will restore David's fallen tent. I will repair its broken places, restore its ruins, and build it as it used to be, <sup>12</sup> so that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations that bear my name," {12 Hebrew; Septuagint so that the remnant of men and all the nations that bear my name may seek *the Lord*} declares the LORD, who will do these things. <sup>13</sup> "The days are coming," declares the LORD, "when the reaper will be overtaken by the plowman and the planter by the one treading grapes. New wine will drip from the mountains and flow from all the hills. <sup>14</sup> I will bring back my exiled {14 Or will restore the fortunes of my} people Israel; they will rebuild the ruined cities and live in them. They will plant vineyards and drink their wine; they will make gardens and eat their fruit. <sup>15</sup> I will plant Israel in their own land, never again to be uprooted from the land I have given them," says the LORD your God.

### **"Restoration Day"**

165 years of Christian ministry in this community. Throughout the years, Claude Presbyterian Church has transitioned from being a central gathering place for Scottish immigrant Presbyterians to being a fellowship of rural Southern Ontario people who moved out here singing "I'm going to the country baby, gonna paint my mailbox blue." That's a little of Taj Mahal lyrics if you're wondering. Today, this area is a place of retirement, and for others, merely a place to sleep while they work and play in the big cities. For the most part, the

predominant places that community happens in the area today are at the local sports arenas and soccer fields and most of that happens on Sunday mornings.

For Christian ministry to continue and to grow here now, we have to accept that many of the people around us have little understanding of the true nature of Jesus Christ, and that many people misunderstand the Christian faith. In addition, we must accept that perhaps even we, who call ourselves the Church, have forgotten what the true Christian church is. Though we often have a sense that God has upheld us in faith, we have a book we hardly read and symbols that we don't quite understand. Our challenge is to live together as a Christian community, a living expression of the nearness of the Kingdom of God and to bear witness to our neighbours, wherever and however we might find them. Our challenge is to proclaim along with Jesus: “The kingdom of God is at hand, turn around and invest you life in it” (Mk. 1:15).

In order to do this we must try to understand the reason why true community is so difficult in our culture. This is why I have been preaching from the Book of Amos these past few weeks. You will have noticed that Amos hasn't yet had much to say that is uplifting. In fact, only the last 5 verses of the entire book are uplifting. These five verses look forward to the day of restoration when the LORD will restore what he has torn down for a faithful remnant. So, let's just take a refresher on what God, had to say to the Israelites through Amos and how it translates to us now nearly 2,800 years later.

If you remember, the Assyrians were laying waste to the Middle East all the way to Egypt. God sent Amos from the Southern Kingdom of Judah to the Northern Kingdom of Israel to tell the people that God was going to destroy them as a nation and send them into exile. The people didn't listen, and 40 years later, the Assyrians arrived at their doorstep and conquered the northern Kingdom of Israel. Two years later the Assyrians ended up at the gates of Jerusalem in the Southern Kingdom of Judah. However, King Hezekiah repented and God saved the Israelites from total destruction. Hezekiah's repentance bought Judah another 120 years. After Hezekiah's reign the people again ignored the LORD and worshipped other gods, and were taken into exile by the Babylonians. For both the northern and southern kingdoms, the LORD had had enough.

So what was their problem? Put simply, it was their gross disregard for justice and equity within their community. They had forgotten the LORD and had become complacent and greedy. The wealthy and powerful handful who thought they were untouchable even by God were abusing and taking advantage of the poor in the land. The Assyrian conflict surrounding them was causing food and other resources to become scarce. Those who had kept it to themselves and those who had a lot used their wealth to make more at the expense of the poor. Understand this, the LORD has built into his creation that justice and equity are laws that order human community in the same way that there are physical laws that govern the orbit of the planets. When human beings disregard justice and create communities that are not founded in equity and fairness, the poor get poorer, widows and children and the elderly starve to death and injustice prevails. Humanity spirals to its destruction like a planet spiralling out of its orbit.

Today, we live in a world that looks a lot like the microcosm of Israel in Amos' day. Things have not changed much and Amos' words to Israel should ring true to our own ears. We are faced with a potential global economic catastrophe and a global food crisis. Millions continue to die of starvation because richer nations have taken advantage of them. Children and the elderly suffer of diseases that are 100% treatable and preventable. Innocent people all over the world (and right here at home) by our own laws are denied justice and equity. Our planet can no longer sustain our idolatry of Mammon, of wealth and prosperity or of “progress”.

Like ancient Israel, we have complacently looked on in as this impending global crisis has manifested itself, yet we are failing to change our way of life. Economically speaking, our way of life requires that there be an ever increasing number of people for whom injustice and poverty are inexcusable realities. We have ignored the ways of the Lord and, as wealthy Western benefactors of the rich and powerful handful, we have willingly and somewhat unknowingly participated in the injustices that have been perpetrated in the name of success.

Friends, I will tell you a secret. The Day of Restoration that the LORD promised through Amos began almost 2,000 years ago with Jesus and is here among us even now. He planted a seed, himself, into humanity by gathering a group of people to himself to show them the ways of his kingdom, and at Pentecost filled them with himself in the Holy Spirit. Here's what that early Christian community looked like as the Book of Acts attests: <sup>42</sup> “They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. <sup>43</sup> Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. <sup>44</sup> All the believers were together and had everything in common. <sup>45</sup> Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. <sup>46</sup> Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, <sup>47</sup> praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved” (Acts 2:42-47). That's the Kingdom of God breaking into this world in its fullness. That's what it looks like when the reaper is overtaken by the plowman and the planter by the one treading grapes. It's what it looks like when new wine drips from the mountains and flow from all the hills.

You know, and I mean this with an affectionate sense of humor, out here in Caledon we have our share of people who tell us to try to live on a 100-mile diet which means eating only what you can buy within a 100 mile radius of where you live. They tell us if you need a car buy an economy car or a hybrid or better yet get together with several people and buy a car and share it. They tell us that our money should be spent on relieving injustice in our community and in the world instead of being stored up in bigger and bigger banks for something called retirement. They tell us that the more we can do to share things in common, including cars and lawnmowers, then the more just and equitable and environmentally friendly human community will be. Heck, some of us say their nuts. But, honestly, we only say that because their way of life threatens our addiction to wealth and prosperity, to having our own stuff. These people are

onto something that looks very much like what the LORD manifested in the early church and could manifest today if we were willing to do what the LORD pleaded for his people to do through the prophets: to lay aside our false gods and take up the way of life he has freely given us.

I have said before that because of the Holy Spirit's living in us we are the embryonic form of the new humanity that is coming when Jesus returns. The gift of the Holy Spirit has created in us a nature of being that did not exist before the day of Pentecost. We are New Creation and we bear witness to it when we live out the love of God in our midst, for it is the answer to the brokenness of humanity and the futility that the creation suffers.

Today we celebrate 165 years of Christian ministry in this community. Today we will something that the early Christians did when they celebrated the presence of the LORD in their midst. We will gather around the Lord's Table and share his feast and then we will gather around tables and share Christian fellowship over a meal. We still have this in common with the early church. How can we make the rest of our lives to be lives shared in common? Amen.