

**Amos 5:18-24; Luke 12:32-40**

**"What are we waiting for?"**

This morning we heard several scriptural texts in which the coming of the kingdom of God is proclaimed, loudly and insistently and a bit dramatically. In fact, the lectionary texts for the entire month of November, leading up to the season of Advent, call us insistently to **reflect on** and **prepare for** the day of God's coming.

November is not an easy month of the lectionary. These are not easy texts to deal with, either as a listener or a preacher. There is a reason no one reads the prophet Amos right before going to bed at night. There are so many *nice* passages in the Bible: scripture verses featuring fluffy white sheep, green pastures, and everlasting peace. In the November lectionary, there are no fluffy sheep.

But the truth is that, biblically speaking, the idea that **our Lord is coming** just can't be ignored. Wherever our Bible falls open, we encounter the persistent idea that God is coming, and sooner rather than later. Whether we open to the Hebrew prophets, the gospels, the epistles, or the book of Revelation: the biblical authors are **very, very sure** that **God is coming to dwell among us, and soon**. In fact, they just can't stop talking about it. The Bible closes with that promise: At the end of the last chapter of the last book of the Bible, three times John recorded Christ's wonderful promise: "I am coming quickly". And in verse 20 John, and all Christians, respond with deep yearning, the cry of our hearts: "Even so, come, Lord Jesus!"

Any yet - **we don't talk much** about the Bible's prophetic urgency, this relentless insistence that the day of the Lord is at hand. Prophets like Amos feel almost embarrassing somehow. They are **impolite**. They're too **dramatic** for our taste. Amos reminds me of the **sidewalk prophets** who often stood on the street corners of Cleveland, Ohio, where I grew up. I don't see many sidewalk prophets in Munich, but poverty-stricken Cleveland was full of them: shabby, unkempt, often homeless men carrying hand-painted signs "Repent, the Day of the Lord is near" and crying out to pedestrians about destruction and judgment. Amos feels a bit like that. Who wants to be seen chatting with the highway prophets? When I encountered one of these sidewalk prophets growing up, I dropped my eyes and hurried past.

But we can't ignore the Bible or its prophets who, oddly enough, are crying out the same message. "Repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand" .... "The Kingdom of God has come near." It's an **echo** that rings out to us from every prophet – this morning from Amos and from our Lord himself, who told the disciples to proclaim it to everyone who would listen.

Reading the Bible, it seems that the Kingdom should have arrived by now, doesn't it? But honestly, the Kingdom "at hand" and "come near" **does not always seem true** to our experience as **human beings in a broken world**. We wake up every morning and face a world of violence, uncertainty, and injustice. We experience personal devastation, watch the evening news or follow the political situation in our home countries and wonder - where is the Kingdom? The read in the Bible that the Kingdom of God is near, close, soon, almost here. But when we look around, we can't help but ask: *when? where?* We might say to God, *no offence, but things down here look as bad as ever*. **We've been waiting a long time**. When are we going to start seeing the signs of the coming Kingdom?

But the question I want to ask this morning is: ***what are we waiting for?***

Some Christians, it seems to me, are waiting for easy way out of the mess we're in, a one-way first-class luxury airfare to a better world. There are an awful lot of people waiting for their golden ticket to heaven, those who are already trying on their white robes for size and planning their eternal retirement behind the pearly gates. There are people waiting to be showered with prosperity, wealth and comfort.

But according to Amos and Jesus, those people are waiting for the wrong thing. According to Amos, what we're waiting for is for *justice to roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream*.

**What are we waiting for? We're waiting for justice. Righteousness. Equality. Peace.** We are waiting for the Kingdom. But our texts this morning are clear: we are called to *bring* God's kingdom into being. We are to be "ready for service", as Jesus says this morning. Nowhere in my Bible does Jesus say, "*sit back, relax, put your feet up*. I've

*got this covered. No need to lift a finger.”* We are clearly, unmistakably called to work, care and love alongside our God in creating and realizing the vision of the Kingdom.

“Be dressed, ready for service”, Jesus tells us from the Scriptures this morning. In other words, put on your overalls and your work gloves, and get ready to labour beside me.

When the followers came looking for **John the Baptist** in the early chapters of Matthew, Jesus said to them, “What did you go out to see? A man dressed in **soft robes**? No, those who wear soft robes are in kings’ palaces.” Plush white robes, Jesus says, are for earthly royalty. The laborers of the Kingdom are dressed for action, ready to work. Let’s roll up the sleeves on our work clothes and get our hands dirty for the kingdom, because **our call** is to **labor** and **service**.

Jesus came to be a laborer in the harvest, and it is our call to go out with him into the fields. **The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few!** And there is no need to wonder, “what can I do?” “What work is left?” “What needs are begging to be filled?”. There is no lack of needs to be filled, people to be loved, mouths to be fed, brokenness to be healed. Look around you. The world is crying out for our love, our touch, our passion, our service. The only question is whether we are willing to take off our white robes, put on our work clothes and head out into the fields and streets with Jesus.

**What are we waiting and working for?** The vision is clear:

*Let justice roll down like waters,  
and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream*

Every time I hear these verses of the prophet Amos, I also hear the voice of Martin Luther King, who loved to use this verse in his sermons in the fight for equality for black Americans in the 1960s. And yes, I do know that I’m just a little white girl and I can’t do justice to a sermon of the great Dr. King, but I’d like to try, anyway, and read you an excerpt of a sermon called “I’ve Been to the Mountaintop”, delivered in Memphis, Tennessee in April 1968.

*It's all right to talk about "long white robes over yonder," in all of its symbolism. But ultimately people want some suits and dresses and shoes to wear down here! It's all right to talk about "streets flowing with milk and honey," but God has commanded us to be concerned about the slums down here, and his children who can't eat three square meals a day. It's all right to talk about the new Jerusalem, but one day, God's preacher must talk about the new New York, the new Atlanta, the new Philadelphia, the new Los Angeles, the new Memphis, Tennessee. This is what we have to do."*

(End quote.) To Dr. King's list we can easily add "the new Munich," or the new Cleveland, Ohio, the new Ghana or Nigeria, the many different places we come from. We could even talk about "**the new Peace Church**", since there are plenty of needs to be filled right here among us.

**What are we waiting for?** The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Pick a plot that looks ripe and ready to harvest, pull on your work gloves, and get to work. Where God calls you to go, go. From the civil rights to women's rights, from to the fight to achieve income equality, to the battle to obtain a better quality of life for immigrants and asylum seekers, the struggle to end violence against women: there are plenty of fields calling out for dedicated workers, servant's hands. The only question that remains is: **what are you waiting for?**

This brings us back to the question of urgency and anticipation - the question of timing. The prophet Amos lived almost three thousand years ago, and a few more millennia have come and gone since Jesus announced that the Kingdom of God was "very near" and "at hand". **Where are you, Lord?**

**When, Lord? When?** Sometimes we feel we've been waiting and praying for a long time. Every Sunday when we pray the Lord's prayer, we cry out with the unchanging refrain, "**Your Kingdom come.**" Or we cry out with John the Revelator: "Even so, come, Lord Jesus!" What we mean by that is, Lord, we desperately need your redeeming touch, your healing power, your radical peace. We want things here to change. We want our world to be charged with the radical justice and peace that characterize the Kingdom.

But when we're looking in the right places, I think we can already detect evidence of God's coming among us. The traces are everywhere. I think we can say with confidence that the Kingdom of God *is* at hand. It's on the march.

We can **hear** the Kingdom when we listen to the sermons of Dr. King and other prophets of justice. The kingdom sounds like many voices and languages proclaiming complete equality and racial integration. I also think the Kingdom sounds like Christians from 30 different countries singing together at Peace Church on Sundays! We can **see** the Kingdom of God in every courageous attempt, no matter how great or small, to defend human dignity and secure a decent life. The Kingdom looks like fair treatment for asylum seekers and adequate social and medical care for all. We can **feel** the Kingdom in the brothers and sisters of our congregation who support and care for one another across boundaries of origin, race, language and gender. The Kingdom feels like a bear hug, the kiss of peace, the laying on of hands for prayer. We can even **taste** the Kingdom: it tastes like communion bread, or a warm meal in a hungry stomach.

The Kingdom of God grows and solidifies with our love, our service, and our participation. And **it is coming** - right here, in our midst, in our service and in our love.

In fact, I wonder if the very best place to see and recognize the Kingdom of God is from the **inside**. After all, when we are working *for* the kingdom, we are working *in* the kingdom. Perhaps the Kingdom of God is visible only when looked for in harvest field and on the streets. Perhaps the Kingdom is the **reality** we witness and experience when we go out into the world to serve, love, and labor. That means that if we really want to see and know our Savior, we may need to join him where he is: in the fields and on the streets: laboring, preaching, praying, serving, healing, loving.

## **What are we waiting for?**

While we're waiting for a glimpse of the kingdom, let's put on our work clothes and join our Savior in the fields.

While we're waiting for the day when justice will roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream, let's ask God where we can labor in the justice movement, or where our serving hands can be used to promote righteousness.

While we're waiting for our Lord to come, for all to be made well, for the earth to be renewed: let's roll up our sleeves and serve one another with all of our love.

Let us join our calloused, working hands together and cry out with all the saints: *Even so, come, Lord Jesus!*

## **Let us pray.**

YOUR KINGDOM COME:

Lord, may it be not just a refrain on our lips, but the cry of our hearts.

Send us out to labour

in the fields, the streets, this church community, our workplaces, and our lives:  
because the Kingdom is on the way, and we want to be a part of it.

Together we cry out, even with our very lives:

**EVEN SO, COME LORD JESUS!**

**Amen.**