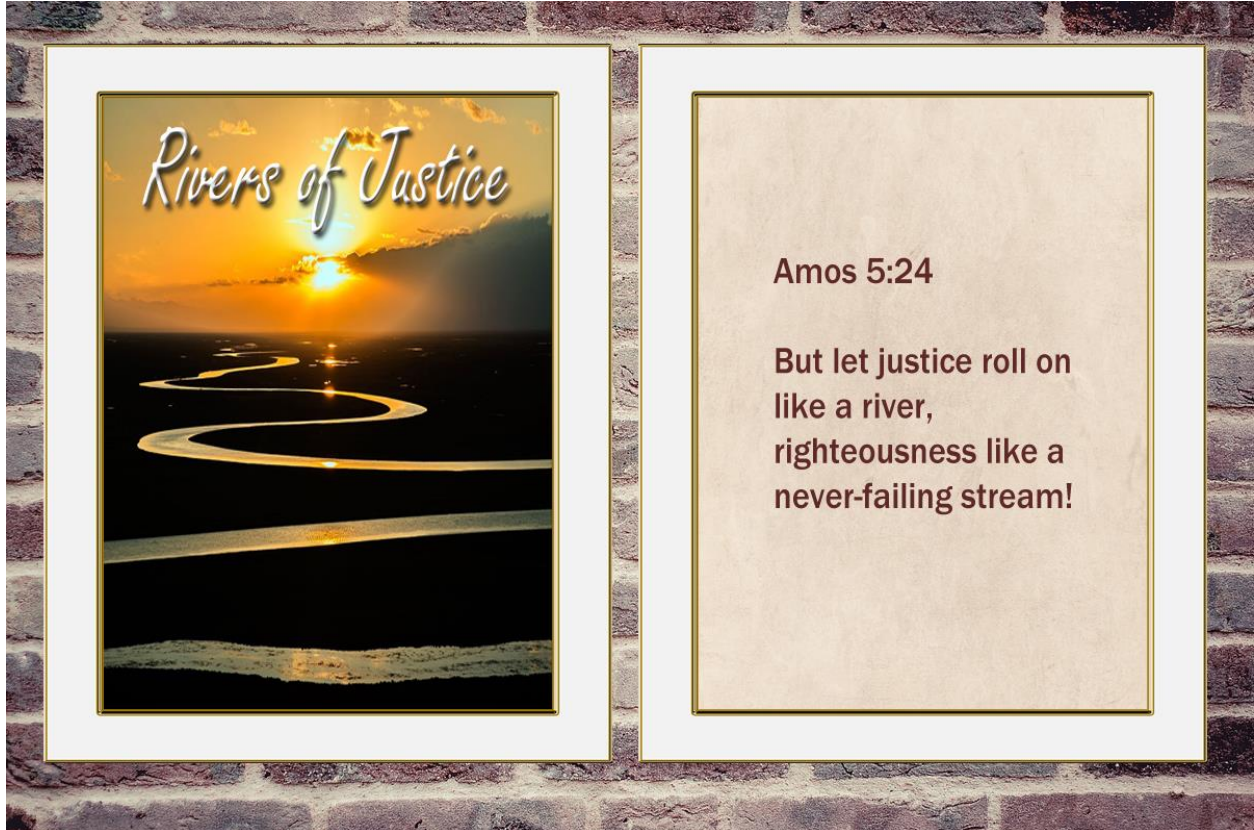


8/18/24

“RIVERS OF JUSTICE”

**Amos 5:24**

**But let justice roll on like a river,  
righteousness like a never-failing stream!**



**Special Music: “The Justice Song” Selorm Tamakloe and Kaign Christy**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IASdERt3-m0>

## **A SIMPLE MATTER OF JUSTICE**

Deputy Marsha Wagner was performing her afternoon patrol of the Parable neighborhoods. It wasn't terribly hot, so she had the windows down in her cruiser and was enjoying the late summer air. The routine she had was more about letting the community know that the Sheriff's Office was keeping an eye out for them, but Deputy Wagner thoroughly enjoyed interacting with the people that she encountered. Parking the cruiser under a shade tree, the deputy got out and started to walk around the block.

Patricia Danners' kids, Francine and Nicholas, were playing in the sprinkler in front of their house. Maria Gonzalez was busy tending her garden. Several children had started up a game of baseball in an open lot they often used. Stephanie Nash was washing her daddy's car, slinging bubbles everywhere. Marsha stopped to chat with Paige Turner for a minute. Paige was walking her dog, Chipmonk, a cute Yorkie with an unpredictable temper.

Her conversation with Paige was cut short when the deputy heard two people squabbling a few houses down. Giving Paige her apologies, she quickened her step down the sidewalk to find the source of the noise. She was surprised to find Tommy Ballard red-faced and shaking his fist at Janice Sanchez as he tried to maneuver past her. Tommy owned Pete's Bar and Grill, was known to get himself worked up on occasion over trivial matters. But Janice was one of the most soft-spoken people in town. The deputy decided she should probably step in before things got ugly.

Tommy had a cloth bag with him that was filled with peaches. He looked like he was about ready to blow a gasket. Janice was standing between him and his car, fists firmly planted on her hips and not giving an inch. She had planted her feet and it was obvious that she had no intention of letting Tommy have access to his automobile.

“Hey, hey, hey, now. What’s going on here?” Deputy Wagner spoke out with authority. “Tommy, you back up right now. I’m not going to ask you twice. Janice, I know you are upset, but I want you to come over here away from Tommy while I try to get to the bottom of this!”

It was clear that Tommy didn’t want any interference, and stayed where he was at, his anger now turning toward the deputy. But Jancie did as she was told and moved away from Tommy, giving him plenty of distance. Deputy Wagner moved toward Tommy letting him know that he needed to stifle the attitude, or this conversation was not going to end well for him. He lowered his fists to his side and relaxed just a little.

“Now Tommy, what is going on here? What has you so riled up?”

“I just wanted to borrow a few peaches from this tree,” Tommy mumbled. The deputy looked down at the cloth bag that Tommy was carrying. It seemed that what Tommy meant when he said ‘a few peaches’, he actually meant several dozen.

“Just stand right there, for a second, Tommy.” The deputy swung around to chat with Janice for a minute.

**“This is your house, isn’t Janice,” she inquired. Janice meekly nodded. “So that would make this YOUR peach tree, right?” Janice shuffled her feet and nodded again. “Did you give Tommy permission to pick the peaches he is holding?”**

**“No mam. I mean deputy. I just noticed him taking the peaches to his car and I tried to stop him. But, I didn’t hit him, Marsha. I just stood in his way. He didn’t like that very much.”**

**“No, I would think not, Janice. Okay, just wait here. Give me another minute with Tommy.”**

**“Okay, deputy.”**

**The deputy turned back to face Tommy. She thought she had figured out what was going on. Looking Tommy directly in the eye she asked, “Did you ask Janice if you could pick those peaches, Tommy?”**

**“Why would I do that deputy? They were just hanging there. They weren’t behind a fence and there weren’t any signs.”**

**“But Tommy, you know that this is Janice’s house, right?”**

**“Of course I do. Everyone knows where Janice lives. And for the record, if she didn’t want people picking her peaches, she should have done something to protect them, like put up a fence.”**

**“So, Tommy, you feel that if someone were to come over to your place and pick several dozen peaches, you wouldn’t have a problem with that.?”**

**“I would have a problem with that deputy! I’m saving those peaches for the peach festival. I plan to beat out John Grautmeyer this year. He’s won the last three years, but not this year. No siree. I even have a sign near my trees that reads: “Don’t Pick My Peaches.” It’s as plain as the nose on your face. And if I were to catch someone picking my peaches, they are liable to get hurt. Those are my prize fair peaches. Janice never enters her peaches at the fair, so she really doesn’t need them. I do need them because I have company coming and I’m making peach cobbler.”**

**Marsha rubbed her forehead in disbelief. If Tommy hadn’t been so threatening, this matter might have been laughable. How could anyone believe that this was legal or even moral?**

**“Tommy, why didn’t you just go down to Big Sam’s and buy some peaches to make your cobbler?”**

**Tommy laughed at the idea. “Now why would I do that when these are right here don’t cost me anything?” The deputy could see that Tommy felt no remorse for what he had done. There wasn’t even a hint that he felt he was in the wrong.**

**“Tommy, I have heard enough. You really don’t understand that you can’t do this, do you? You don’t realize that you are stealing from Janice. It doesn’t make any difference that she doesn’t have a sign up. This is her tree and her peaches. You should be ashamed of yourself, Tommy.”**

**“But... but... but...”**

**“No buts Tommy. The question now is what am I going to do about it?”**

**The deputy motioned for Janice to join them.**

**“Janice,” the deputy said calmly, “It’s obvious that we can’t put the peaches back on the tree. So here is what I suggest. Why don’t you let Tommy buy the peaches from you?”**

**“Well, I guess that would be all right. Assuming I got a fair price?” Janice replied.**

**“Okay, so how much are peaches over at Big Sam’s Market?”**

**“Oh, they are way to expensive over there,” Tommy blurted out. “He gets \$2.50 a pound and I would never pay that much.”**

**“Well, we don’t have a scale here,” said the deputy. “So, we will have to price them by the piece. I’m thinking two bucks a piece should cover it. And how many are in that sack, do you think.”**

**“Looks to be about four dozen,” Janice said with a smirk. “That would make it out to be about \$96.00”**

**“Oh, let’s make it an even hundred,” said the deputy.**

**“That’s robbery!” shouted Tommy. “I’m not going to pay that! Never!”**

**“Well, let me rephrase it this way, Tommy. You will pay Janice \$100 dollars for those peaches, because if you don’t, I will arrest you right here and now for theft. And with it being Friday, you won’t be able to see Judge Trudy until Monday. So, you will spend the weekend in jail. Come Monday, she assuredly**

**will find you guilty since I will be more than happy to testify. And when she does, she may keep you in jail for a bit longer and fine you for the offence and court costs, shouldn't be more than four or five hundred. Unless, of course, you can find a lawyer in town willing to handle your case, which will then put the costs in the thousands. And here's the thing, you will still end up paying Janice \$100 for the peaches."**

**"That's blackmail, deputy, and you won't get away with it."**

**"No, it's justice, Tommy. You wronged Janice. Can't you see that? And you can either compensate her here and now, or we can do it the hard way."**

**"But..."**

**Marsha held a finger up to Tommy's lips to shush him. "Now open up your wallet, Tommy. Because that is the only thing keeping you out of jail."**

**Tommy pulled out his wallet and reluctantly handed Janice the money.**

**"Nice doing business with you, Tommy," Janice said as she smiled as she danced back into her house.**

**"The Sheriff and the Judge are both going to hear about this, deputy. You aren't going to get away with this."**

**"Oh, they are going to know about this before you tell them, and you will be lucky if they accept this little arrangement instead of going ahead and throwing the book at you. Have a good day, Tommy."**

**Deputy Wagner turned and walked back to her cruiser and as she dropped in behind the wheel, she felt pleased with her solution. She wasn't sure how it would all work out in the end, but for the time being, justice had been served.**



**But let justice roll on like a river,  
righteousness like a never-failing stream!**

The Prophet Amos is one of the Twelve Minor Prophets. I hate that term minor prophet because all it really means is that his book is shorter than a major prophet. But saying that someone is a minor prophet sounds like a downgrade. And it's not. Amos lived around the time of Jeroboam II and Uzziah, about 760 BCE. He never claimed to be a prophet. As a matter of fact, Amos tells us about himself in Amos 7:14 **"Amos answered Amaziah, "I was neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet, but I was a shepherd, and I also took care of sycamore-fig trees."** He was an in your face, reap what you sow, divine retribution kind of guy who championed the poor. Amos constantly sought justice for those who had been denied justice. In a time where the rich and powerful were always favored by the justice system, he was a lone voice calling out a more balanced approach to justice based on truth. As a Christian, you just gotta love this guy for his forthright approach to righteousness and justice. Amos was a cross between Don Quixote and Martin Luther King at a time in history when such an attitude was extremely unpopular. This is the kind of guy that I would want on the Supreme Court. Someone who can call out wrong and injustice for what it is and not let the average Joe get trampled under the shoes of the rich and powerful.

**But let justice roll on like a river,  
righteousness like a never-failing stream!**

**In our story today, if Deputy Wagner had been in a larger town, she would never have been able to handle the situation the way that she did. Small town justice can look different from the justice found in a larger town where people aren't as familiar with everybody. I'm not a fan of vigilante justice, but I think everyone must have a superhero that they admire who doesn't hesitate to step in to protect people from injustice.**

**We are taught in school that justice is tied to our legal system, but as we grow older and wiser, we see that such a notion isn't always the truth. A legal judgement can be an unjust judgement. The system can be manipulated by lawyers and judges who turn a blind eye to justice for whatever reason. It happens often enough that we tend to lose faith in our legal system, that justice is often elusive, especially if we live within the impoverished ranks of society. Having said that, I want to state that I believe that Americans still have the greatest legal system on the planet, in spite of its faults.**

**We talked recently about Red Letter Christianity. If we are confused about justice, how to approach the situation as Jesus sees it. Jesus talks about justice in Matthew 23:23-14 and say this:**

**23 "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former.**

**24 You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel."**

What exactly is Jesus telling us here? He's telling us how easy it is to get our feet tangled up in the strings and cords of the law without ever dealing with the most important matters. He's telling us that while it is important for us to have a giving heart and to follow the law the God gives us help keep us faithful and true to his righteousness, if we forget the important parts, the reasons for the law, the spirit of the law, the justice, mercy and faithfulness that comes with observing the nature of the law, then we have failed. If we become so focused on the minutiae of the law, we will forever fail to see the big picture because we are staring at our tangled feet.

God's law was never meant to turn us into mindless robots that only follow orders. Instead, it is presented to us to provide guidance as we seek to demonstrate justice, mercy, and righteousness to those around us. God's law was never meant to be a sword that we wield against those who differ in their beliefs, but instead, it is a guidepost to remind us of where truth, justice and mercy abide.

God abhors injustice. When we participate in acts of injustice, he is deeply disappointed with us because it breaks a basic tenet of our covenant with him. We are to pursue justice, not just for ourselves, but for everyone.

**“Defend the weak and the fatherless;**

**uphold the cause of the poor and the oppressed.**

**Rescue the weak and the needy;**

**deliver them from the hand of the wicked.,”**

**(Psalm 82:3-4)**

**“Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed.**

**Take up the cause of the fatherless;**

**plead the case of the widow.**

**(Isaiah 1:17)**

**“He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”**

**(Micah 6:8).**

**36 “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”**

**37 Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’**

**38 This is the first and greatest commandment.**

**39 And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’**

**40 All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”**

**(Matthew 22:36-40)**

**How can justice prevail if we fail to step into the expectations God has for us in our service to his children?**

**That's what I would like for us to think about this week. How can we do better fighting the injustice around us? How do we lift the people that are struggling and hurting? How do we teach others to embrace justice? How do we example the bravery it may take to step into situations that we find uncomfortable in order to secure justice for others? All good questions for us to examine and contemplate.**

**But let justice roll on like a river,  
righteousness like a never-failing stream!**

**God bless you all!**

**AMEN**

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