



July 6: Wade in the Waters | Amos 5:21-24

Have you ever considered our faith is more than church on Sunday? Like there's gotta be more to our faith, right?

There's gotta be more to our connection to God than 50 minutes on Sunday? Let's do the math. There are 168 hours in a week and if church is 2 hours, allowing for Fellowship or serving...that equals about 1.25% of our week. That can't be all there is.

I don't know about you, but I have felt it before - some restlessness, a longing for something bigger. A stirring that asks, **What is holding us back from experiencing real peace — in our church, our communities, and our lives?**

And maybe more importantly a seeking that asks, **What is God inviting us into -right now-to bring more of God's kingdom to life — here and now, specifically, in tangible ways?**

As good Methodists, we love our churches and Sunday worship — and rightly so. This is a beautiful church, filled with a loving, faithful, gifted congregation, with 138 years of being a strong presence of Christ in this community. That is something to be proud of, something to celebrate!

But let's be honest, if Sunday morning becomes the only way we live out our faith — more of a box to check off — then I think we'd all agree, we're missing something essential.

And hear me - it's not that we haven't done good work around this. We've engaged in compassion and stood for justice. But maybe today...it's a time to pause...to check the tank.

And maybe ask ourselves or each other, **How much fuel is left for the road ahead? How much passion, energy, and commitment do we still have for the works of justice?** For standing up for what is right, protecting the mistreated, and doing the work that brings real, lasting peace.

Like we heard earlier in the video, this is hard, sacred work, this growing as peacemakers. It's the hard work of overcoming what divides us here, standing for what is right, promoting fairness, compassion, integrity, that ushers in God's kingdom **"on earth as it is in heaven."**

The prophets remind us - faith, our faith is not confined to these walls. It's about how we live, love, and labor for justice in the world beyond these four walls. Our Conference has put words to Amos' vision, to be a church: rooted in Jesus... grounded in Wesleyan theology... inclusive of all... and (here it is) actively engaged in justice and reconciliation.

I remember the moment my contentment with church at 1.25% was shattered – in the best, holiest way. It was the summer of 2018, at North Park Seminary in Chicago, I was working toward my certification as a spiritual director.

It was just another class – or so I thought. Ellen, the director of the program, was teaching that day. She was talking about listening – the kind of deep, soul-level listening that’s at the heart of spiritual direction.

And then, in the middle of that sleepy classroom, she said something that electrified my slumbering spirit. She asked a question I will never forget, **“Is that all there is to the life God is calling us to? Church attendance? Is that really what Jesus died for – Sunday services?”**

*And then she just growled, **There’s gotta be more!**”*

And in that moment, something inside me...woke up.

It didn’t shout. It didn’t make a scene. But it stirred...it sat up.

And that part of me heard an invitation that was a bit wild, a bit untamed, and very ALIVE – and that restless, holy hunger hasn’t settled down since.

I’m still captivated by, “What if there really is more?”

What all might an Almighty, All-Powerful God be calling us to?

Because deep down, I think we all know: There’s gotta be more.

We feel it now more than ever. The world is crying out for peace. For respect, for dignity, for justice for one another. And the need is urgent. Peace is meant to be central in our relating. **“Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts...”**

But what if peace doesn’t rule? What happens when fear rules? When hatred rules? When silence takes the place of courage? History gives us the proof.

Pastor Martin Nee-muh-ler, a German pastor who lived through the rise of Nazi Germany, reflected on what happens when peace is absent – when people stay silent in the face of injustice.

His words are a haunting reminder that working for peace is NOT optional or a certain few, when he famously warned:

“First they came for the Communists,
And I did not speak out—
Because I was not a Communist.

Then they came for the Socialists,
And I did not speak out—
Because I was not a Socialist.

Then they came for the trade unionists,
And I did not speak out—
Because I was not a trade unionist.

Then they came for the Jews,
And I did not speak out—
Because I was not a Jew.

Then they came for me—
And there was no one left
To speak out for me.”

When peace doesn't rule, injustice has free reign.

When peace doesn't rule, silence becomes dangerous.

And so we are called—not only to *hope* for peace, but to *live* it, *speak* it, *protect* it... even when the cost is high.

And faith...our faith, demands more.

The prophet Amos had the same challenge for his people. Calling his people to wake up, to hunger for more. They loved their worship. They sang their songs. But they neglected justice. And Amos called out to them...Wake up.

“Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.”

And he used two powerful images in that wakeup call: lifting burdens and surging waters.

Amos' very name means “to carry” or “to lift a burden”. Amos was not a prophet or radical by profession, he was a shepherd and a farmer...practical, down to earth.

You may only need a dentist once a year, a lawyer once in a decade — but you can thank a farmer three times a day for breakfast, lunch and dinner. I saw that on a billboard while traveling on my vacation.

Amos was a practical man. And he understood at a basic level, where his identity and faith intertwined, that following God meant being a person who lifts burdens.

In Amos' day, power and wealth were concentrated in the hands of a few. While ordinary people carried impossible loads. Sound familiar? It should. Though thousands of years have passed, the same unequal dynamics still burden people today.

Let's reflect together:

Predatory lending — payday loans, crushing interest rates, housing scams...

Wealth concentrated at the top while basic needs go unmet...

Modern “debt slavery” trapping families in poverty they can't escape...

Like Amos, will we speak truth to power?

Will we be burden lifters?

Amos' second image is even more striking! He says in chapter five, verses 23 and 24, **“Let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-ending stream.”**

Amos' word for “water” is **mayim**, the same Hebrew word...listen to this...that is used in Genesis 1:2. The same Hebrew word used to describe the deep, chaotic waters that existed before creation began — a vast, wild, life-giving force that only God could contain.

Amos is not picturing a peaceful brook or gentle stream. He is pointing to something fierce, untamed, life-transforming!

Picture Niagara Falls or the Amazon River, a surge so unstoppable and powerful it reshapes everything in its path.

Do we believe justice is meant to be that unstoppable, that transformative, that alive...today?

Amos is calling for a version of justice that is unrelenting and as capable of redirecting everything. That when we hear Amos say, **“Let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-ending stream.”** ...an image closer to home for us might be...

...the Mighty Mississippi.

From the Ojibwe “great river” or “gathering of waters”. The Mississippi winds through our towns, wide, mighty, shaping the land, everywhere, everywhere and dominant.

And when it floods? It reminds us who's really in charge. You don't tell the Mississippi where to go—it finds its own way. It carves valleys, feeds crops, moves people and yes, sometimes it overflows, washing away what isn't built to last.

That's the kind of justice God desires. Not polite suggestions, not shallow puddles of good intentions—but a rolling, roaring river that keeps moving, reshaping, nourishing, and cleansing as it goes.

God's justice is like the Mississippi – wide, unyielding, impossible to ignore.

God loves water imagery. God used water in many ways in our faith history. Consider these powerful images of water and their connection to justice, safety, deliverance, and transformation - the flood of Genesis 5, the parting of the Red Sea, the Jordan River (in both testaments!), the pool of Bethesda that brought healing, Jesus as Living Water...bringing forth life, and the river of the water of life in Revelation 22.

What does it mean for justice to be like water that surges and is “ever flowing” in contrast to a parched land or a trickling brook?

And here's more truth: faith requires more than worship. And to be clear — we *do* have great worship here. And we can love it! But worship disconnected from justice? That's what Amos was warning about.

It's not enough to sing the songs, say the prayers, or check the box. If our actions, our systems, our community does not reflect God's priorities...we've missed the point.

And the people of God had missed the point. They were claiming to worship, while refusing the actions of aligning their lives, their choices, and their systems with God's priorities — priorities like justice for the vulnerable, protection for the marginalized, and fairness for the oppressed.

It's easy to see this disconnect in ancient Israel. But what about us?

Where do we face the same holy disconnect - between what we say and what we do as a church?

It's a hard question — but maybe exactly the one we're meant to ask if we believe, like Amos challenged, like Ellen reminded me, like Jesus taught — *there's gotta be more! Amen.*

Here are some questions to ponder in our Time of Reflection:

1. Where in my daily life — beyond Sunday morning — do I feel God stirring me to be a burden-lifter or a peacemaker?
2. How might our church — Buffalo United Methodist Church — let God's justice roll like a mighty river in our community, not just in words, but through real, tangible action?