

“Defying Gravity: Standing Up for Good”
Amos 5:14-15, 21-24

One of my favorite songs in the musical *Wicked* is “Dancing Through Life.” In it, one of the main characters, Fiylero, presents his philosophy on how to cope with the world. For him, “dancing through life” is a way of avoiding conflict, skipping past discomfort, and staying relatively happy:
<https://youtu.be/jniq78mKKcM?si=GxA1-h3Bh5pl4VAS>.

But deep down, we know this philosophy does not make for a truly meaningful life. At the heart of human existence is a deep urge for genuine connection and unity with others. This is not the artificial uniformity of the Emerald City, where citizens must hide their uniqueness just to fit in. Instead, it is a real connection—one deeper than external appearances, fears, and egos.

In *Wicked*, Elphaba acts almost like a prophet, calling her community to a deeper wisdom where the common good becomes a physical manifestation of unity. She sees the forced uniformity and manipulation of the Wizard of Oz for what it truly is: the exact opposite of the common good. This is most clear in her willingness to risk her own safety to defend the Talking Animals, who were being stripped of their rights to serve as pawns in the Wizard’s game of control.

Throughout history, this pattern of human behavior repeats itself:

1. **Identify an enemy.**
2. **Vilify them and strip them of their dignity.**
3. **Seek to destroy them, believing that by harming them, you will secure your own happiness.**

The Prophet Amos: Truth-Teller in a Time of Plenty

The prophet Amos found himself in a remarkably similar situation. Amos was a simple shepherd from Tekoa in the southern kingdom of Judah who was called to go preach to the northern kingdom of Israel around 750 BCE.

In the Old Testament, prophets were not fortune tellers predicting the distant future; they were **forth-tellers** and **truth-tellers**. Inspired by God, they spoke directly to the people—especially to those in power. Biblical prophets fulfilled two major roles:

- They helped people gain **consciousness** about the true reality of their situation.
- They helped people **imagine** a different reality and a hopeful future.

This dual calling defined the ministry of Amos. He prophesied during an era when everything seemed to be going wonderfully for Israel. Much like the Emerald City, everything was glittering and happy on the surface. But often, beneath a façade of prosperity, there is no solid foundation of justice—only an empire built on ego.

The people of Israel had lost their ability to think critically about their society, accepting systemic abuse as normal. On the surface, things looked great:

- Wealth and international trade were booming.
- Religion flourished with grand temples and sanctuaries.
- The elite enjoyed luxurious winter and summer homes.
- Entertainment and signs of success were everywhere.

Yet none of this impressed Amos. Beneath the glittering façade, he saw spiritual and social decay. The people had forgotten the faith of their ancestors—the faith of enslaved people who escaped Egypt and knew firsthand what oppression felt like.

Amos called Israel out for their injustice and systemic violence. They were reducing human beings to mere commodities: trading on the Sabbath, overtaxing the poor, cheating the needy in court, shorting measurements, and cutting ethical corners for profit. Greed had replaced God's commandment to love neighbor and care for the vulnerable: the widows, the strangers, and the orphans.

To those who understood that true faith demands economic justice and ensuring everyone has enough to survive, Israel's system had become an engine of evil and oppression. Amos foresaw that this path led directly to self-destruction, compelling him to speak harsh truths in a time of widespread comfort.

Here is a brief overview of the book of Amos from The Bible Project:

<https://bibleproject.com/videos/amos/>

Scripture Reading: Amos 5:14–15, 21–24

Seek good and not evil, that you may live; and so the Lord, the God of hosts, will be with you, just as you have said. Hate evil and love good, and establish justice in the gate; it may be that the Lord, the God of hosts, will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph.

I hate, I despise your festivals, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals I will not look upon. Take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your harps. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream."

A Vision of What is Possible

Even as Amos condemned Israel's injustice, he presented them with a divine vision of hope. He sought to capture their imagination, urging them to dream of God's justice rolling down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

Logically, this image felt impossible to his listeners—they lived in an arid land with few permanent water sources. Their souls were thirsty for justice, but their minds were trapped by the harsh realities of the desert. Yet through faith, Amos saw what was possible with God: **true unity, equity, and shared abundance for all of creation.**

It is no wonder these words have echoed with such power across centuries. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. famously quoted Amos from Montgomery, Alabama, calling people to imagine a society where Black Americans were treated with justice, dignity, and equality.

This vision of God's kingdom—a reign of active justice and transformative love—was the central message of Jesus. And this same message calls us together today as a congregation. It challenges us to use our gifts in the church and in our broader community to raise awareness, care for the vulnerable, and help envision—and build—a different future.

We will spend a few moments in prayer together.

Loving and Gracious God, invite us now into the quiet sanctuary of our own hearts. Take a deep breath in... and let it out. Allow the noise of the week, the distractions, and the impulse to simply "dance through life" to fade into the background.

Imagine yourself standing in an arid, open desert. Feel the heat of the sun above you and the dry, cracked earth beneath your feet. Feel the dust in the air. This desert is the world as it so often feels—a place of scarcity, where fear tells us to guard what is ours, where the vulnerable are forgotten, and where facades of success hide a deep, aching spiritual thirst. Feel that thirst within yourself—a deep longing for things to be made right, for genuine connection, for peace.

Now, look down at your open hands.

In this dry place, you hear a soft sound in the distance. It starts as a whisper, like a gentle breeze, and then deepens into the steady rhythm of moving water. You look up toward the horizon.

Out of the barren sand, a stream begins to flow. It isn't a trickle; it is a clear, cool, rushing river carving a path through the dry ground. This is God's justice—unstoppable, life-giving, and refreshing.

As the waters reach your feet, feel the cool shock of the current. Watch as the dry earth drinks it in, bringing green life, grass, and blossoms to places that were once barren. Feel the water washing away the weariness, the cynicism, and the fear that keeps you quiet when you ought to speak up.

Take a deep breath of that cool, fresh air.

God is inviting you to step into this stream. Not to hide from the world, but to be refreshed so you can transform it.

Ask God quietly in your heart right now: *Where are you calling me to stand up for good? Whose voice needs me to amplify it? Where can I be an instrument of your justice this week?*

Loving God, do not let us settle for the illusion of a quiet life when you have called us to an abundant, courageous life. Break our hearts for what breaks yours. When it is easier to look away, give us the vision of Amos and the courage of Elphaba to defy the status quo, to stand up for the vulnerable, and to speak truth in love. May your justice roll down like waters in our lives, in our city, and across our world, and may righteousness flow through our hands like an ever-flowing stream. In your holy and transforming name we pray. Amen.