

## CCOW's Preaching Notes for Fairtrade Fortnight 2025

### Week 2: Sunday, 28 September

*These are the notes for the thematic readings in the Revised Common Lectionary. We have used the [Vanderbilt online lectionary texts](#) (RSV) to prepare them.*

#### **Amos 6: 1, 4 to 7**

*Woe to those who are at ease in Zion and for those who feel secure on Mount Samaria.*

*Woe to those who lie on beds of ivory and lounge on their couches and eat lambs from the flock and calves from the stall, who sing idle songs to the sound of the harp and like David improvise on instruments of music, who drink wine from bowls and anoint themselves with the finest oils but are not grieved over the ruin of Joseph!*

*Therefore they shall now be the first to go into exile, and the revelry of the loungers shall pass away.*

While the Old Testament sometimes points to riches that are rightly used as a sign of God's blessing, it is also clear about the danger wealth poses: as noted in last week's readings, riches can easily supplant God as the centre of our universe.

In this Amos reading, there are many questions about the specifics of particular phrases: Are the people involved 'at ease' in Zion, overly comfortable in the apparent security of their wealth? Or are they 'neglectful' of it or 'despising' it, having abandoned their focus on God to enjoy their wealth?<sup>1</sup> Either way, the gist of the reading is clear: these are people who have their priorities wrong.

They lounge on expensive furniture, eat the choicest animals, drink wine in large quantities - bowls not cups! - and anoint themselves with the finest oils. They are arrogating to themselves the best, instead of offering it in sacrifice to God. The contrast is particularly notable in the music: they may use harp and instruments as David did, but unlike David, they sing idle songs for their own pleasure, not the praises of the Lord.

Coddled by their luxury, they fail to be grieved by what grieves God, the 'ruin of Joseph' - where Joseph refers to either the Northern Kingdom of Judah or more likely, given the people addressed, both the Kingdoms of Judah and Israel.<sup>2</sup> Again, there are questions about what Amos might mean by 'ruin': commentators have wondered whether it is the prior captivity of members of those kingdoms, the ruin of the moral and religious environment, or the prospect of

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<sup>1</sup> Cf Joseph Benson, *Commentary on the Old and New Testaments* (New York: T Carlton and J Porter, 1857) <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/benson/amos/6.htm>

<sup>2</sup> Cf discussions in Juliana Claassens, 'Commentary on Amos 6:1a, 4-7' (2025: Working Preacher Commentaries), <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-26-3/commentary-on-amos-61a-4-7-6>; R Wayne Stacey, 'Amos 6: 1 – 14: Exegesis and Sermon' (Liberty University, 2002) LBTS Faculty Publications and Presentations. 375 [https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/lts\\_fac\\_pubs/375](https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/lts_fac_pubs/375); and Rolf Jacobson, 'Commentary on Amos 6:1a, 4-7' (2010: Working Preacher Commentaries) <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-26-3/commentary-on-amos-61a-4-7>

God's future judgement because of the way leaders have turned from God and practiced injustice.<sup>3</sup>

Whatever the case, this focus on pleasing the self, allied with a failure to be moved by the failures in the moral and political scene that move God, will have consequences. It will mean, the prophet says, that the wealthy will be the first to suffer exile, and their revelry will come to an end.

As we look at this reading, our own circumstances will vary widely. For some of us reading this, a life of luxury will be a distant prospect; others of us may be people for whom expensive furniture, food, and drink are well within reach. If we are the latter, this passage calls us to ask: where are we putting our focus? Is it on spending money for luxuries? Or on serving God with all that God has put at our disposal, caring for the moral and political well-being of our society, noting those places where God's people are in need, and using our resources of time and money for the common good?

For all of us, the key question remains: how can we ensure that we are focused on serving God, first and foremost? How can we open ourselves to being grieved by the things that grieve God - such as injustice and oppression? How can we be moved to address those issues, rather than focusing on our own pleasure?

To link this reading with Fairtrade, you may wish, in your preaching, to speak not only about the importance of daily choices being made for justice (eg choosing Fairtrade products) but also about the need to look more widely at the unjust trade structures which allow a relatively small number of companies that have a great deal of power to amass significant profits for themselves and their shareholders while the farmers who supply their products remain in poverty. An [Oxfam study showed that in some cases, less than 5% of the final retail price of Assam tea went to pay the tea workers](#). Tackling injustices in the tea trade forms the centrepiece of this year's [Fairtrade Fortnight petition from the Fairtrade Foundation](#): could you encourage people to sign it?

It may be worth noting, too, that it can be tempting to turn inwards in today's tumultuous world, feeling that problems are too big for us to be able to make any difference. Fairtrade is a reminder that we can actually make a significant difference: currently around 2 million farmers and workers benefit from the fairer structures of trade that it offers; farmers globally have used more than 1.5 billion Euros in Fairtrade premiums to develop their communities – building schools and clinics, improving roads and access to water, and undertaking myriad other activities.<sup>4</sup> And that's all because of the choices that individuals and institutions make, day by day.

Finally, some people may argue that Fairtrade products are themselves luxuries. There is a major area for exploration within that relating to the true costs of production, and how in an economy distorted by imbalances of power and exploitation, paying the true costs of production can look like a 'luxury'. But the reality is that because so much of the price of goods actually goes to people further up the supply chain, Fairtrade goods don't have to be more expensive than conventional ones. Indeed, major retailers often offer key Fairtrade products such as chocolate, tea, coffee, sugar, and bananas for prices that are no higher than you would

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<sup>3</sup> See above, as well as various interpretations found at <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/amos/6-6.htm>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.fairtrade.net/en/why-fairtrade/impact/key-figures-at-a-glance.html>

expect to pay for conventional products. Similarly, you can buy an inexpensive Fairtrade coffee or tea from Greggs, or perhaps from a local café, for far less than a conventional coffee in many more expensive settings.

### **Psalm 146**

*Praise the LORD! Praise the LORD, O my soul!*

*I will praise the LORD as long as I live; I will sing praises to my God all my life long.*

*Do not put your trust in princes, in mortals, in whom there is no help.*

*When their breath departs, they return to the earth; on that very day their plans perish.*

*Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD their God,*

*who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them; who keeps faith forever;*

*who executes justice for the oppressed; who gives food to the hungry. The LORD sets the prisoners free;*

*the LORD opens the eyes of the blind. The LORD lifts up those who are bowed down; the LORD loves the righteous.*

*The LORD watches over the strangers; he upholds the orphan and the widow, but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.*

*The LORD will reign forever, your God, O Zion, for all generations. Praise the LORD!*

Last week, we had the first of a group of psalms of praise called the 'Egyptian Hallel'; this week we have the first of another such group, the five psalms of praise that end the Book of Psalms.

Again, the psalm begins and ends with a call to praise the Lord, and in between gives the reasons why God is worthy to be praised. God is the creator. God is faithful. God is a just ruler. And again, the portrayal of God as the omnipotent, exalted, faithful ruler focuses on God's care for people at the margins: God executes justice for the oppressed; gives food to the hungry; sets prisoners free; opens the eyes of the blind; lifts up those who are bowed down; watches over the strangers; upholds the orphan and the widow. And, as a just ruler should, God favours those who are righteous, but frustrates the plans of those who are wicked.

As followers of Jesus, we are called to have God's focus as our focus. If God loves justice, so should we. If God acts out of concern for the oppressed and marginalised, so should we. And if, in a world where wealth is often an unjust king, we encounter opposition or scorn for what we are doing, we should not worry. We are following God's call - and God is the creator, faithful and powerful. Praise God indeed.

### **1 Timothy 6:6-19**

*Of course, there is great gain in godliness combined with contentment, for we brought nothing into the world, so that we can take nothing out of it, but if we have food and clothing, we will be content with these.*

*But those who want to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains.*

*But as for you, man of God, shun all this; pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and for which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.*

*In the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, I charge you to keep the commandment without spot or blame until the manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ, which he will bring about at the right time--he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords. It is he alone who has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see; to him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen.*

*As for those who in the present age are rich, command them not to be haughty or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches but rather on God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share, thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that really is life.*

### **Luke 16:19-31**

*"There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man's table; even the dogs would come and lick his sores.*

*The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried. In Hades, where he was being tormented, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side. He called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in agony in these flames. But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that during your lifetime you received your good things and Lazarus in like manner evil things, but now he is comforted here, and you are in agony. Besides all this, between you and us a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who might want to pass from here to you cannot do so, and no one can cross from there to us.'*

*He said, 'Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father's house--for I have five brothers--that he may warn them, so that they will not also come into this place of torment.*

*Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them.' He said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.' He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'"*

The final two readings from Timothy and Luke are often difficult for preachers not because they are complex to interpret, but because their meaning is so clear ... and so contrary to the norms of our society. Timothy is blunt: the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil, and pursuit of riches leads to pain. Instead, the people of God are to be content with having enough to live on, and to pursue the things that really matter - righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, and gentleness - as they await the coming of Christ, the great King. Interestingly, the epistle doesn't suggest that the wealthy should immediately give up all their riches - but they are to use them for the Kingdom: "to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share, thus

storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that really is life."

The rich man in Jesus' parable, however, has done none of these: he could, indeed, be a case study of what Timothy outlines as a general issue.

Nothing in the parable suggests that the rich man was unusually wicked in the way that he acquired his wealth. But like the wealthy in Amos, he was content to enjoy his own pleasure and not concerned about what happened to others. The poor man Lazarus sat outside his gate in evident need, and the rich man simply left him there. Even after his death, the rich man still assumes that other people exist for his benefit: in conversation with Abraham, he requests that Lazarus be used to serve his interests - to quench his thirst and to warn his family.

Abraham is clear, however. Lazarus does not exist for anyone else's pleasure. He is having his consolation for the sufferings he endured. As for the rich man's brothers - if they didn't listen to God speaking through the law and the prophets, would they listen to anyone else?

The challenge to those of us with wealth is real: we have not only the law and the prophets but also the Gospel. Can we hear God telling us loud and clear that we should live in ways that value each person with whom we come into contact, including those who grow the food we eat and make the clothes and other goods that we use? Can we set aside our pursuit of wealth and pleasure to focus on righteousness?

One of the joys of Fairtrade is that it enables us to see the people behind the products we use - people with value, needs, and hopes of their own. Buying Fairtrade is only a small part of what Jesus calls us to - but it is an important daily choice that we can make to ensure greater fairness for brothers and sisters around the world. We can also strive to help create fairer systems of trade - once again, you might point to the petition! - so that fewer people are left in abject need.

But why stop there? If we are truly to live out the Gospel, what more can we do to steward the gifts shared with us temporarily to create lasting value and more righteous societies?