

Grace to you and peace from God, our Creator, and from our Savior, Jesus Christ.
Amen.

For many of us, it's difficult to not hear the voice of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. when we hear the words from Amos 5:24 – Let justice roll down like water and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

In his “I Have a Dream” speech, Dr. King changed the words slightly to emphasize the urgency of his message. And when we hear the “I Have a Dream” speech today, for many of us, it's an inspiring and empowering message that moves us toward hope. And it encourages us to hold onto that vision of justice and righteousness as we work to create the world Dr. King dreamed of – the world that is in line with what God wants.

But on the day he gave the speech – August 28, 1963 – Dr. King wasn't as popular as he is today. His message wasn't well-received everywhere or lifted up by everyone as a vision that our nation should work toward.

In his work, Dr. King disrupted the people who wanted the system to stay as it was – pushing some people down while letting others rise. He woke up people who'd been allowed to be complacent about the racial divide in our country. He encouraged people to push back, to demand better.

And it got him killed.

It isn't a stretch to call Dr. King a prophet. By definition, a prophet doesn't predict the future. A prophet is someone who speaks the truth about the way things are – even when it's offensive.

A prophet speaks the truth, and keeps speaking it, knowing that not everyone wants to hear it and that some will outright refuse to acknowledge it, and even hate them for it.

But they do it anyway because God has called them to. And many times, they're just ordinary people.

When God called the prophet Amos, he was a shepherd from the hill country outside Jerusalem in Judah, the southern kingdom. But God called him to prophesy against the nations surrounding the northern kingdom of Israel, and against Israel itself.

It was a time of societal and economic decline and recession. The kingdom of Israel was threatened on every side. It was surrounded by its enemies. And its people were

anxiously anticipating the “day of the Lord” – the day when they believed God would deliver Israel from its enemies.

Their faith was rooted in God's commitment to their safety, and they continued to expect God's aid in the future. They were eagerly waiting for God to save them as God had done so many times in the past.

But Amos tells them in no uncertain terms that the day of the Lord isn't going to be what they expect. And Amos' words are as harsh as they sound. There's no sugar-coating them, and there's no wiggle room for a softer interpretation.

God's really angry at the people. They've messed up. They've broken the covenant, their relationship with God. And they did it by separating their worship of God from the way they lived. There was a complete disconnect.

When they worshiped, they honored the festivals. They made their sacrifices and offerings. And they did it all properly. But that's all they did. They were just going through the motions. There was no depth, no connection between their worship of God and their daily lives.

The way they worshiped God neglected the care of their neighbor – the people who were most vulnerable. They weren't paying attention as people were being mistreated, oppressed, or taken advantage of.

These were people they were commanded by law to care for. The people God was most concerned about and has always been most concerned about.

They were simply showing up for worship and then going home. And God was outraged.

But for all of God's anger, God didn't stop loving them. God gave them instructions for what to do. God reminded them how God calls them to live: Let justice roll down like water and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

In other words, what God is saying to them is: Remember whose people you are – remember you are here because of what I did for your ancestors in the land of Egypt. Remember the way I taught them how to live during their time in the wilderness – the way that has been passed down to you. Remember the rules you agreed to live by – that you agreed to live in such a way that others can live, too.

God's call to them wasn't about worshiping so that they received God's love, but about integrity in their worship – remembering that their worship is a response to God's love. And that God's justice cannot be separated from God's love.

It was a summons to wake up, and a call back into relationship with God.

This summons, this call into relationship with God, is for us, too. And I'm not saying there's a disconnect between our worship and the way we live. We don't live it perfectly, but as a congregation we do live it faithfully.

But this summons, this call into relationship with God, is a reminder for how God calls us to live all the time. Paying attention to what's going on around us. Speaking the truth about the way things are. Living in such a way that others can, too. Even when it's hard. Even when it's inconvenient. Even when it offends people.

Jean Wahlstrom puts it this way: "Take what you sing on Sunday and let it be your creed for Monday and the rest of the week."

If we think about worship as something we only do on Sunday, in a specific place and at a specific time, it's easy to compartmentalize it and separate it from the rest of the week and the way we live. But our worship is a response to God's love. And we don't only experience God's love in here.

It spills over into the rest of our lives in abundance. It is what empowers us to care for our neighbor, the people who are most vulnerable. To speak out and step in when we can.

To live lives that bring God's love and justice into the world.

¹Pastor Heidi Torgerson serves a congregation in one of the Chicago suburbs – one of the areas experiencing a lot of ICE patrols and raids.

On Friday morning, just two days ago, Pastor Heidi attended a weekly prayer vigil outside an ICE facility. Later that morning, 15 moms from her neighborhood were arrested in a peaceful demonstration in front of that facility.

A collective of interfaith leaders has formally requested access to the facility to provide pastoral care and spiritual support to those who are being held there. That request has been denied, and the federal government is in the process of trying to ban prayer and clergy presence from the area altogether.

Yesterday morning, ICE was in Pastor Heidi's neighborhood. There were some landscape workers in her neighbor's yard – she went out and told them that her back door was open, and to run into her house should ICE show up.

¹ <https://www.facebook.com/torgerson.heidi>. Accessed November 8, 2025.

They finished their work without incident, but an hour later, an ICE vehicle drove in front of her house. A Rapid Responder was right behind them, honking the car horn to alert anyone within earshot in the hopes of helping them get to safety.

Pastor Heidi doesn't share all this to draw attention to herself, but to speak the truth about what's going on in her neighborhood. It's a response to God's love.

²In the US, we depict justice as a woman that is standing blindfolded and holding a set of scales. But the image Amos calls to mind is completely different. Justice is like a surging, cleansing stream. It's constantly in motion, and sometimes it's in an uproar. It doesn't ever rest.

³Dr. Cornel West reminds us that justice is what love looks like in public.

Let justice roll down like water and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

In the same way God's justice can't be separated from God's love, we can't separate our worship from how we live. It's a response to God's love and, as Christians, it's part of who we are.

It is what empowers us to care for our neighbor, the people who are most vulnerable. To speak out and step in when we can. To live lives that bring God's love and justice into the world.

To remember that God's love and justice are a summons to wake up, and a call to be in relationship with God. A relationship where everyone is loved, and beloved.

Thanks be to God! Amen.

² Limburg, J. *Interpretation: Hosea-Micah*, p.107

³ Dr. Cornel West