

# Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost

## AFFLICTED AFFLICTERS AND THE RIGHTEOUS AFFLICTED

**Amos 5:6-7, 10-15**

**Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost**

**Analysis by Joseph Justus van der SABB**

*6 Seek the Lord and live,  
or he will break out against the house of Joseph like fire,  
and it will devour Bethel, with no one to quench it.*

*7 Ah, you that turn justice to wormwood,  
and bring righteousness to the ground!*

*10 They hate the one who reproves in the gate,  
and they abhor the one who speaks the truth.*

*11 Therefore, because you trample on the poor  
and take from them levies of grain,  
you have built houses of hewn stone,  
but you shall not live in them;  
you have planted pleasant vineyards,  
but you shall not drink their wine.*

*12 For I know how many are your transgressions,  
and how great are your sins—  
you who afflict the righteous, who take a bribe,  
and push aside the needy in the gate.*

*13 Therefore the prudent will keep silent in such a time;  
for it is an evil time.*

*14 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.*

*15 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.*

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## **DIAGNOSIS: Affliction Bears Affliction**

**Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) :** *The Afflictors are out there. And Big Brother is watching them.*

- “You who afflict the righteous (v.12b)” ... can there be any more powerful an indictment ever written? Whether or not the speaker considers himself to be one of the “righteous,” everyone knows that it’s just not cool to afflict the righteous. They’re the righteous, for crying out loud!
- The thing about afflicting the righteous, or anyone, however, is that it’s very easy to do. Easy: no effort required. Almost accidental! No cost incurred. No disastrous consequences; people hardly notice! Except for those occasional pesky prophets standing in the gate (v. 10) and decrying the tax rates or this or that, there would be only sucking silence as the righteous bleed out.
- Afflicting the righteous... easy versus uncool... and easy wins every time. Our world is full of Afflictors who choose easy gain over upholding the trampled poor (v. 11). Name them, if you dare. Speak out against them in the gate, mortal. Who? Me? As if. God forbid I be pesky. Me or anyone I know. We are the prudent. We keep silent in such a time (v. 13). It’s the recommended policy.
- Why is this a problem? Only because this one guy, the

Lord, the God of hosts, says the Afflictors have it coming (v. 6). He says he's gonna get even on behalf of the afflicted. On the other hand, talk is cheap!

**Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) :** *We are the Afflictors. And Big Brother is watching us.*

- Seek the Lord and live (v. 6)? Seek good and not evil (v. 14)? Love good and hate evil (v. 15)? Us? Hahahaha. Lol. Lmao. Rofl. Nervous giggle. Ok, well, "hate" and "evil" are pretty strong terms here. Is "sometimes-shy-away-from" good enough?
- "The only thing necessary for evil to prosper is for good men to do nothing." Define "nothing."
- We're talking about the evil we commit AND the good we omit? Oh boy.
- As individuals ... or as one of the billions "made in his image" who live in, with and under a System? That is, how much responsibility must I take for the world around me?
- This is where we squirm uncomfortably. Because we do participate in a System that does not meet God's standards of Justice. We play the role of unwitting, unwilling participants in affliction, even if we are not, per se, Afflictors... right? We're part of the System. We eat because of it. We pay taxes to sustain it. We take what small comfort there is in knowing it could never be different, that we are only doing what we have to, that this is how the system works. We accept our small, humble share of the plunder. We take our earnings and our chances, seize our opportunities and carpe our diems. And we don't ask questions and we don't pretend things could be different "if only..." So go for it, blame us for not being perfect, but don't call us Afflictors!
- Would that a prophet would stand in the gate and call it like it is: bribery. Big and small, we accept our 'bribes'

as our due—our coupons, our perks, our incentives, our frequent flyer miles, our lucky breaks—our privilege. We push aside the needy standing at the gates of our outlet malls and city centers, our nursing homes and refugee camps.

- And what lies at the heart of us? Sin, you say? Come on! Surely fallible humans wanting a better life does not qualify as “many transgressions” and “great sins.” Nothing nearly so deadly as that! All we’re trying to do is seek a good job and live. Seek a good meal and live. Seek a good version of our favorite religion and live. Seek a good grade and live. A good day. A good time. A good diet. (Note that each of these ‘goods’ is aimed at self: a good job (for me), a good meal (for me), a good time (for me), etc. We are (almost always) unrepentantly, unashamedly, unquestioningly, even, focused on OUR OWN good.)
- The endless justifications are numbing! But “seek the Lord and live?” Not us. Could our hearts be any further from “seeking the Lord”?

**Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem)** : *God is the Afflicter of Afflictors; and the Prudent keep Silent, for it is an Evil Time.*

- This could still end well for the righteous... assuming God is clever enough to find a few of them under a rock. After an endless age of affliction, the Lord, the God of hosts might still come through for them and be gracious to the remnant. As long as the remnant is really a righteous remnant and not a posing remnant.
- Because, you gotta remember, this God is the Lord, the one who knows many transgressions and is a great locator of sins. Theirs AND ours. He can tell poser righteous from real righteous.
- You and me? Poser righteous. If that.

- Guilty as hell, we, all of us, are left in the terrible hands of God the Afflicter, the Lord of Just Oppression, who bullies the bullies. Who torments the tormentors. Who burns with fire against the house of Joseph, devouring Bethel, and no one can stop him.
- “You! You who afflict the righteous.... [fill in your own blank, mortal].”
- The guilty keep silent and call it “prudence” ... maybe he won’t notice us. Like Adam and Eve. Silent and guilty and hiding.

## **PROGNOSIS: The Righteous Afflicted for the Afflicted Afflictors**

**Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution)** : *God is the Righteous Afflicted. God Afflicts His Own Righteous One.*

- First, God is the Righteous Afflicted, the innocent sufferer, the one who chooses to suffer and die on our behalf.
- Second, God the Afflicter is behind the torture and death of God the Afflicted. Imagine two infinitely large and infinitely fast trains heading toward each other on the same tracks. “You choose to stand in the way? So be it.”
- In the aftermath, Jesus invites his friends to come and have breakfast. His life, suffering, death and resurrection are, for them, the graciousness of the Lord to the remnant of Joseph. Though they were far indeed from being “righteous,” the ones who believe in Jesus are his friends. He says so. And his friends share his breakfast, his supper and his fortunes. All of them.
- This train wreck has other casualties and when things are patched up, they’re not arranged the way they were before. For instance. “Seek the Lord and live. (v. 6)” It’s bent.

“As I am sought by the Lord, I live!” “The Lord seeks those whom he enlivens.” “Living the Christ-life, we get to seek the Lord.”

- Want to see more casualties? God the One who bullies the bullies and torments the tormentors? That one has been stapled back together upsidedownways, with love and compassion and mercy ever flowing for tormentors and bullies and, to be sure, the afflicted.
- One more? “Woe to you who brought righteousness to the ground, mashing justice against afflicted wormwood (v. 7).” But this Jesus stands there in the train wreck and nothing is the same. “All Hail the Righteousness come to earth / whose affliction, blood and wormwood / establishes, in grace, a remnant. Alleluia.”

**Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : The Afflicted Afflictors are made Righteous.**

- Borne though unquenchable fire and watery depths, the afflicted afflictors hang onto Jesus. Even when the God, the Lord of Hosts comes looking with his Great Transgression Magnifying Glass, they hang tight behind Jesus. Nor are they silent, nor are they guilty. They presume to walk with him in the garden, along the road, wherever he leads. And they are not ashamed, nor prideful, for instead of being **found righteous**, they are **made righteous**.
- These who are made righteous have clarity about the System of this world which renders us each to be always “part of the problem” and are therefore bold to stand in the gates as forgiven sinners; also part of the solution. And what is the solution, you might ask? It must be about that toward which we strain and yearn, about that which we seek. Seeking our own comfort, security and pleasure, we fell prey to affliction (i.e. we became the afflictors).

What happens when we seek good, instead of evil? What life can be born when we seek the Lord instead of our selves? When we “Love one another as I have loved you?”

**Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution)** : *The Afflictors are out there. And Big Brother is watching over us.*

- What does our freedom look like? No surprises here; in broad strokes, it looks like seeking good and not evil. But not because we want to avoid being afflicted by God or others. This is New Creation from the DNA up. Selfish ethics give way to selfless ethics. We seek good and not evil because in our honest-to-goodness heart we do not wish to afflict others. Why would we? How could we desire anything which promotes our own interests at the expense of others'? That's not who we are anymore. Taking a few refrains from Amos, then: we support and tend the needy. We speak the truth. We reprove in the gate and give levies of grain to the poor. Build houses of hewn stone for others to live in. Plant vineyards and give the wine to others.
- In sum, seeking good and not evil, we really truly live.
- May the Lord, the God of Hosts, be with us, just as he has said.