

Remember who we are

Evensong Ordinary Sunday 5A (8 February) 2026

Amos 2:4–16; Ephesians 4:17–32

We can so easily forget who we are. We can so easily forget who we are – and when that happens we can get badly off track. I've done that – maybe you have as well. That's what had happened with the people of Judah and Israel condemned by the prophet Amos. Judah and Israel have forgotten the importance of living according to God's ways. They've rejected the law of the LORD, they've been led astray by the same lies their ancestors followed. This is sin as amnesia – losing their memory of God's truth, forgetting how God calls them to live, forgetting that the Torah isn't just about regulating worship – it's also about guarding justice, equity, and looking after the whole community. Abandoning the law is abandoning the neighbour the law was given to protect. Amos calls us to remember that righteousness and justice are two sides of the same coin

Not only have they lost touch with the law, they've forgotten what God has done for them, forgotten the Exodus, when God freed them from slavery in Egypt. This forgetting enables injustice, and so a freed people enslaves others, those who were once poor now exploit the poor. The weak are oppressed by those with power: the needy are turned into commodities, the vulnerable shamed, bodies are exploited. Is it any wonder God rejects worship funded by dispossession? Social injustice begins with theological forgetfulness. When the poor are sold for a pair of sandals, that's not just an economic failure – it's a failure to remember the God who freed them.

God's response to all this is to call witnesses of word and lifestyle: to raise up prophets – but they are silenced – and counter-cultural Nazirites – but they are pressured into conformity. It's an image of a community that cannot bear holiness in its midst. And so God names the failure of those who usually escape consequences: the fast, the strong, the skilled, the armed. God's judgement collapses privilege. The story of Judah and Israel is a story of what happens when a people loses touch with who God has called them to be. The punishment for forgetting the Exodus is the Exile. This is not going to end well.

Perhaps with a sense of relief we fast forward to the church in Ephesus. Ephesians likely reflects a later Pauline tradition, addressing how faith is to be lived responsibly in settled Christian communities. What matters for us is the pastoral concern behind this. The writer assumes Christian identity is becoming established – and at risk of accommodation. He's telling the Ephesians that they're not actually as different from the surrounding society as they are called to be. It's a contrast between the old life and the new life – but what happens if you can't remember what the old life, the life before Jesus, was like? It can be easy for us too to forget that Christian ethics always begins with the death and resurrection of Christ. This is what Christ has done for you – and so this is how you should live. Grammar nerds like me phrase this as “the indicative precedes the imperative”: we act as God calls us to act because we're aware of God's actions on our behalf. We forgive because God in Christ has forgiven us.

But the Ephesians are at risk of losing track – and maybe we are as well. “That is not the way you learned Christ!” says the writer: you've forgotten what it means to belong to Christ. He's calling us away from theological amnesia, reminding us that we need to keep learning, keep

teaching one another, how to live as members of a Christian community. And it is as members *of a community* that we are called to this life; the behaviour we're called to display is communal and concrete, everyday realities: speech, anger, work, forgiveness, always remembering that we are deeply connected. Kindness, words that build up, that offer grace, forgiveness. Yes, we'll get angry – but we shouldn't stay angry. We work, but we don't exploit – labour is about sharing, not accumulation – “for we are members of one another.”

The people of Judah, Israel, the community at Ephesus – all are asked to keep in mind that righteousness and justice are intertwined, and that justice begins with the refusal to benefit from someone else's diminishment. Forgetting the poor means forgetting God. Tonight we're called away from theological forgetfulness and invited to relearn who we are. We, no less than the ancient people of God, no less than the Ephesian community, are ones whom God has freed from slavery – whether it's the bondage of Egyptian taskmasters or of our own worse selves, the habits that bind rather than free us. The good news is that liberation is possible, and it happens within the life of God: this is our story, yours and mine. Tonight that is the memory we reclaim, and remembering who we are changes how we live.

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