

*“Child of God: Naming Each One”*

Our Lenten Worship Celebration Series is inspired by the prophet, Amos, whose message is that God calls us to let *“justice roll down like waters.”* Justice is central to the Christian Life. This Waterfall is a powerful image for Justice in our Lenten Worship Celebration Series! Among the waterways, which join in the Living Water – Jesus Christ are important streams – truths about God’s Relationship with all of humanity. **The streams we are examining through this message are:**

**\*Baptism and the naming of the Child of God in baptism;**

**\*God’s Agape Love and Welcome for God’s Children – all people;**

**\*God’s Support and Faithfulness for God’s Children, as we face evil, hardship, and the oppression by the powerful; and**

**\*God’s Demand for Justice as declared by the prophet, Amos.**

**The stream of Baptism** has a long history with Lent for early converts to Christianity frequently went through an intensive period of study, fasting, and prayer to prepare for their baptism on Easter Sunday. **One aspect of baptism is naming the person being baptized.** In fact, some parents and grandparents, want to baptize a baby to officially state the name of the child. However, naming the baptized, is much more important because it reveals our God has called the person by name – there is a special Relationship between the Child of God and the Divine Parent! Remember, our Divine Parent values every Child of God – every human being!

When Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist, God spoke, “This is / You are My Beloved Son”. That was a very special naming! **All people are invited to recognize God is calling them by name for all human beings are Children of God!**

During Lent we will be contributing to the waters or streams of justice each week by writing words on strips of cloth that will be added to our ever-flowing stream. I invite you to write your name onto the strip of cloth you received as a sign that you, beloved Child of God, are part of the waters of love and justice. Please bring it forward with you when coming for communion and to make your offering to God.

In our Reading, the Apostle Paul revealed another stream – nothing can separate anyone from God’s Agape Love. He powerfully said in **verses 38 and 39**, *“For I am certain that nothing can separate us from His love: neither death nor life, neither angels nor other heavenly rulers or powers, neither the present nor the future, neither the world above nor the world below — there is nothing in all creation that will ever be able to separate us from the love of God which is ours through Christ Jesus our Lord.”* Paul was completely convinced the Children of God cannot be separated from our Divine Parent’s Agape – Suffering and Self-Giving Love!

The following *“I Trust You”* video graphically demonstrates God’s Agape Love for people of every race, age, nation, and ethnicity and our call to follow the Almighty’s Example. **[The “I Trust You” video was shown.]**

In addition to the stream of God’s Unbreakable Love for everyone, the third stream is our Divine Parent is looking out for and working for the welfare of all the Children of God! **God Supports us and is Faithful to the promise of our ultimate protection as we – God’s Children face evil, hardship, and oppression and abuse from the powerful.** The Apostle provided us a persuasive proclamation of the Almighty’s Faithfulness and Help in the face of whatever difficulties we may face in our daily lives. He vividly stated this in **verses 31-33**, *“If God is for us, who can be against us? Certainly not God, Who did not even keep back His Own Son, but offered him for us all! He gave us His Son — will He not also freely give us all things? Who will accuse God’s chosen people? God Himself declares them not guilty!”*

Paul wanted us to be clear, we have no reason to fear that someone else can truthfully declare us to be beyond God’s Love and Care, even though, the Legalists in Jesus’ day and the Legalists today try to do that anyway. Further, the Apostle wants us to trust God will enable us to overcome all our real problems and difficulties for he stated in **verses 35 and 37**, *“Who, then, can separate us from the love of Christ? Can trouble do it, or hardship or persecution or hunger or poverty or danger or death? ... No, in all these things we have complete victory through Him Who loved us!”*

Now we come to the final stream for this Worship Celebration’s “Roll Down, Justice!” Of course, it is **God’s Demand for Justice.** In order to more fully understand the dynamics of God’s Call through Amos and its connection with Jesus Christ, I will share a bit of background. **There were two different approaches to Judaism, especially during the New Testament times.** One was that of the **Legalists**, such as the Pharisees, the Teachers of the Law, and the Priests. The other path was that of the followers of the **Prophetic Tradition.** Jesus was part of that Prophetic approach, as was

demonstrated, by his clashes with the Legalists. The Prophetic Tradition and especially Jesus revealed the Love of God is for everyone – for all are God’s Children. **The Prophetic Approach also demonstrated the Divine Parent’s call for the Children of God to work for Justice for everyone.**

The Old Testament prophet, Amos, provided a bold example of God’s Message through this Prophetic Tradition. Let’s consider some of the following selections of Amos’ revelations about God’s Demand for justice from chapter 5 of the Book of Amos. First, Amos exposed the corruption and oppression of the powerful. God spoke through this prophet with some very strong and bold speech. He said in **verse 7**, **“You are doomed, you that twist justice and cheat people out of their rights!”** Unfortunately, the rich and powerful today are often prisoners of such evil because of their giving into the temptation to profit themselves at the expense of the welfare of others. Amos disclosed how the powerful oppressors respond when their actions are challenged in **verses 10 and 12b**, **“You people hate anyone who challenges injustice and speaks the whole truth in court. ... You persecute good people, take bribes, and prevent the poor from getting justice in the courts.”** It should not surprise us then, that the powerful today don’t like having their injustice and wrongdoing exposed. They do not like the Truth. They claim it is False – Fake.

Unfortunately, during this past week, two examples of grave injustice have taken center stage because the powerful have failed to fulfill their sworn responsibilities to protect and serve the people of the United States of America. Those two areas of shame are **Immigration Law for Dreamers** and the **Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness for God’s Children – our children in the face of gun violence**. Next Sunday, our focus for letting Justice Roll Down Like the Waters will especially be on working to stop the mass murdering caused by gun violence against the Children of God.

Remember, Amos previously declared the guilt of the powerful when he said, “You persecute good people, take bribes, and prevent the poor from getting justice in the courts.” Friends, the Dreamers – the people, who were brought to this country as children had no choice and do not know another country as their own. Even the leaders of our government claim, those Dreamers need to be protected from deportation, however, the President created the crisis by declaring an end to protecting them, and now, he is working against bipartisan legislation. This has all been done in the context of declaring non-European immigrants undesirable – unwanted and unworthy of living in the United States. **Yet, as the earlier video and Jesus’ actions and words affirmed God Loves all the Children of God – all people!**

The other example of grave injustice by the powerful has to do with the mass murder in the Florida High School and all of the other mass murders in Las Vegas, in the Pulse Club in Orlando, in the Elementary School, and the church in south Texas. **The Leaders of the US Government have offered very little support – their prayers and, perhaps, possible action about mental illness.** Frankly, many believe the offer of the Leaders’ prayers is hollow and they see the promise of doing something about mental illness as disingenuous, since last year they repealed a law, which prevented some persons with mental illness from being able to obtain some weapons! Meanwhile, the Leaders of our National Government say now is not the time to debate new laws to limit the sale of semi-automatic weapons and large clips or magazines of ammunition. Prior 2004, semi-automatic rifles were prohibited, but now, that weaponry, which is made for and intended to kill many people, has, indeed, killed many of God’s Children – many innocent children, teens, and adults! Instead of protecting the life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness of the victims, Government Leaders have been more concerned about the NRA’s political and financial support of themselves. Remember, God spoke through Amos about the powerful taking bribes.

**Instead of turning a blind eye to the injustice in our country and the world, God calls us in Amos 5:15b to “see that justice prevails”. Let Justice Roll Down Like Waters!**

Before closing, let me mention that earlier today I saw the Republican Governor of Ohio on CNN and I suspect he might have, somehow gotten a copy of this sermon because he affirmed my evaluation of the Federal Governments response to the Dreamers issue and the Mass Murder in the Florida High School.

Turn to someone near you, find out their name if you don’t know it and say this to them, “[Say their Name], you are a child of God.” Amen.