ARROGANT OPPRESSORS THEN AND NOW

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ARROGANT
OPPRESSORS: THEN AND NOW

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Woe to those who are at ease in Zion, And to those who are
secure on the mountain of Samaria, The notable men of the chief of the
nations…. who put far away the evil day, And cause the seat of violence to come
near; Who lie on beds of ivory, And stretch themselves on their couches,
And eat the lambs out of the flock, And the calves out of the midst of the
stall; Who strum on the strings of a harp; Who invent for themselves
instruments of music, like David; Who drink wine in bowls, And anoint themselves
with the best oils; But they are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph.
Amos 6:1-6
WEB

In this
passage of his prophetic litany Amos is appalled by the arrogance of wealthy
tribal leaders who seem not to care about the sufferings of their people. He
describes this hubris of unconcern by saying “they are not grieved for the
affliction of Joseph” (the people descended from the patriarch Joseph).

Their arrogance
includes hordes of possessions and great personal indolence. They anoint
themselves with aromatic oils as they lounge on couches of ivory. They surfeit
themselves on gourmet food and wine while being serenaded by harps. Amid all
this excess they arrogantly refuse to listen to the prophet’s call or to in any
way help those fellow citizens living in destitution. Sounds like decadence of
almost unimaginable scope, especially to an unlettered prophet like Amos whose
only claim to fame was that he listened to God and repeated God’s warnings to his
decadent people.

Their
arrogance prevents them from seeing Daniel’s “handwriting on the wall,” or from
giving any attention to Amos’ threats. As we often must discover only through
suffering, money and its worship tends to separate us from ourselves, our
families, and most of society. We become lonely and isolated, and deal with our
angst by gathering more possessions and luxuries around us, wondering all the
time why life is so unsatisfying.

Look at
today's world with daily reports of mass violence coupled with an angry,
groaning physical earth erupting in natural disaster of every sort. The earth
has good reason to be angry, since it has been pillaged and plundered since the
beginning of the Industrial Revolution. And its people also have adequate
reason to be angry. It's now becoming common knowledge that the recovery from
the Great Recession of 2008 has failed to reach the bottom half of families. In
fact, in the U.S. most of the gains from recovery have gone to the top one
percent of the income pyramid. Why? Because
of the immense power possessed by the same groups of people criticized by
Amos---those who lounge in luxury without a care for the remainder of humanity.

Oh, yes,
they spout great gobs of sympathy for the underclass made poor by their corrupt
manipulation of the power structure. They pontificate much---just listen to
their political promises---but very little that could really help the poor ever
occurs. Congress no longer represents all citizens because it has sold out to
big corporations and their wealthy scions, replacing justice with enthroned
power.

Yes, Amos
was angry, and rightfully so. In chapter 5, verse 7, he charges the arrogant
manipulators of power in this way: "You
who turn justice to wormwood, and lay righteousness to rest in the earth." Amos
perceived the truth as few others of his time did---he saw clearly that
arrogance and greed would soon destroy his society unless it repented before
God. But it did not repent and was soon carried into foreign captivity.

Will the
same thing happen to our country today? Were it not for the unchanging truth
and love of God for his people, it would. But we are in a different time than
Amos. We are in a period of shaking as the Kingdom of God on Earth is being
born. We will see violence and anger, but this time we will turn to God, not
because we are smart or good, but because he promised this in his New Covenant
found in Jeremiah 31 and Hebrews 8. Read it and see what God will do.