

**St Mark's Church, Broomhill and Broomhall  
and the Sheffield Manor Parish  
Lent 2015**



***The Lion has roared –  
who can but prophecy?***

*Amos and the world of 2015*

**Please bring this booklet and a Bible to each session.**

**If you can't attend your usual group, please try  
to join another one for that week.**



## Week One

### Have you anything to say? *What is prophecy?*

#### Opening

#### Gathering prayer:

Let us sit side by side

sharing the same bread drawn from the same source

to quiet the same hunger than makes us weak.

Then standing together

let us share the same spirit, same thoughts,

that once again draw us together in friendship and unity and peace.

*Canadian Indian Liturgical text*

#### Readings:

We can always be sure of one thing—that the messengers of discomfort and sacrifice will be stoned and pelted by those who wish to preserve at all costs their own contentment. This is not a lesson that is confined to the Testaments.

*Christopher Hitchens, Love, Poverty, and War: Journeys and Essays*

Fear prophets, Adso, and those prepared to die for the truth, for as a rule they make many others die with them, often before them, at times instead of them.

*Umberto Eco, The Name of the Rose*

Protesters are still on the fringes like satellites, revolving around the system. But prophets and poets lead us into a new world, beyond simply yelling at the old one.

*Shane Claiborne, The Irresistible Revolution: Living as an Ordinary Radical*

*Optional music: extract from The Prophet's Song, Queen.*

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1 Introductions to one another and to the course.

Light hearted quiz (separate paper so that people can't look up the answers beforehand).

2 Who was Amos? Where and when did he prophesy? Historical setting and geography.

Look up Amos 1, 1-2 and 7, 10-13



Tekoa is to be found roughly where the H of Judah is.

The reigns of Jeroboam II (785-746 BCE) and Uzziah (783-742 BCE) were times of prosperity and peace; the two kingdoms made use of something of a power vacuum between Assyria and Syria, the two major powers in the area, to expand their borders. It was a time when people had reached a low point in their devotion to YHWH, when the wealthy elite were becoming rich at the expense of others, and when peasant farmers were being forced to farm what was best for foreign trade rather than their own subsistence. It was also a period of political

complacency and the expectation that YHWH would heap more blessings and more prosperity on his people.

We will make connection between the situation about 750 BCE and the first fifteen years of the twenty first century.

### 3 What is prophecy?

What comes to mind when you hear the words prophet and prophecy?

### 4 What do we learn about prophets from the Bible, particularly from the Old Testament? (NB there's more than one sort of prophet in the OT: we shall be concentrating on those whose words have been recorded and come down to us through scripture).

Here are some different styles of prophecy to look up:

*Deuteronomy 18, 22.*

This tradition suggests that foretelling is what it is all about. But it is far from the only interpretation or understanding.

*2 Samuel 12, 1-7*

This is 'forttelling'; the prophet Nathan directly rebukes King David in the name of God.

*Isaiah 38, 1-6*

Isaiah and Hezekiah; speaking a word to the present by talking about the future.

*Jeremiah 4, 19-22*

Speaking out of grief; much of Amos' anger may stem from his grief that the people have abandoned the way of the covenant with YHWH.

### 5 How **we** use the prophets is an important issue for this course. New Testament writers scoured the Hebrew scriptures for texts that foretold or had been fulfilled by Jesus – they were very

selective in their choice, ignoring anything that didn't fit and stretching others to make their point.

- Should we do that, or should we try to take a wider view, understanding the prophet in his/her own day and then making imaginative interpretative connections with ours?

6 What about prophets today? Carolyn Sharp of Yale Divinity School writes:

Contemporary prophecy...must spring from rootedness within our communities, and we must be willing to suffer with others. In his recent book, *To Live in Peace: Biblical Prophecy and the Changing Inner City*, Mark Gornik reflects on intentionally relocating to Sandtown, a desperately blighted urban neighborhood in Baltimore, to devote more than ten years of prophetic advocacy among the people there. Gornik knows that a truly God-bearing church "incarnates itself within the community and becomes one with its neighbors in the struggle." This incarnational presence is radically different from tourism or charity. Gornik says, I am not referring to charity, relief, or compassion, but to focused activity that establishes a healthier and more just community. The emphasis is not on programs as ends in themselves or on the renewal of place apart from people, but on the development of people and the celebration of their gifts and callings in the context of their social and material world.

<http://reflections.yale.edu/article/future-prophetic-voice/voiced-paradox-prophecy-and-contemporary-church>

Who do we consider as being prophets for our time? What is it about them and their message that makes them prophets for us?

7 What is one thing you would want to say if you could speak a prophetic word to our society at the moment?

*Next week we shall look at the question of what constitutes justice.*

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## **Closing**

When I come in the guise  
of the needy, the helpless,  
the cold and the hungry,  
the stranger and the lonely  
will you look away?

**What will you do?**

**What will you say?**

When I come close to home  
in the need of your neighbour,  
at times inconvenient,  
in places and faces  
that mask and conceal me...

**What will you do?**

**What will you say?**

When I come in the message  
of prophet and preacher,  
in truths inescapable  
or words which dismay,  
will you listen to me  
and give me a welcome?

**What will you do?**

**What will you say?**

When, face to face  
at the end of the journey  
we look at each other  
will you look away?

**What will I do?**

**What will I say?**

*Kenneth Carveley, from Bread of Tomorrow, p22*

## **Week Two**

### **A passion for justice**

#### **Opening**

#### **Gathering prayer:**

Let us sit side by side  
sharing the same bread drawn from the same source  
to quiet the same hunger than makes us weak.  
Then standing together  
let us share the same spirit, same thoughts,  
that once again draw us together in friendship and unity and peace.

*Canadian Indian Liturgical text*

#### **Readings:**

Human progress is neither automatic nor inevitable... Every step toward the goal of justice requires sacrifice, suffering, and struggle; the tireless exertions and passionate concern of dedicated individuals.

*Martin Luther King Jr.*

In matters of truth and justice, there is no difference between large and small problems, for issues concerning the treatment of people are all the same.

*Albert Einstein*

All religions try to benefit people, with the same basic message of the need for love and compassion, for justice and honesty, for contentment.

*Dalai Lama*

*Optional music: Judge Not, Bob Marley.*

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- 1 Looking back to last week/over the last week, what has stuck you most/stayed with you about prophets and prophecy?
  
- 2 Read  
*Amos 5, 14-15*  
*Amos 5, 24*  
*Amos 6, 12*

3 What do we mean by justice?

A heartbroken father has today called for justice for his two-year-old daughter who was violently shaken to death. Mr X will be in court today to watch his daughter's killer be sent to prison.

Y faces jail after confessing to the manslaughter of Mr X's daughter.

Mr X said: "I just want justice - I want to see him pay for what he has done."

*Newspaper report, October 2014*

For Plato, justice is a virtue establishing rational order, with each part performing its appropriate role and not interfering with the proper functioning of other parts. Aristotle says justice consists in what is lawful and fair, with fairness involving equitable distributions and the correction of what is inequitable. For Augustine, the cardinal virtue of justice requires that we try to give all people their due ... For Kant, it is a virtue whereby we respect others' freedom, autonomy, and dignity by not interfering with their voluntary actions, so long as those do not violate others' rights ... Rawls analyzed justice in terms of maximum equal liberty regarding basic rights and duties for all members of society, with socio-economic inequalities requiring moral justification in terms of equal opportunity and beneficial results for all.

*Wayne P. Pomerleau, Gonzaga University,  
<http://www.iep.utm.edu/justwest/>*

Justice is a conscience, not a personal conscience but conscience of the whole of the humanity. Those who clearly recognize the voice of their own conscience usually recognize also the voice of Justice.

*Alexander Solzhenitsyn*

- Whose voice(s) do we listen to and trust on the matter of justice? Why?
  - What does justice look like in a good society?
- 4 Looking at the passages from Amos we read earlier in their wider context within chapters 5 and 6 of Amos, and remembering the politico-social situation of the time, what do you think Amos meant by justice and righteousness?
- 5 The following example is from our own society last year. You might like to use it, OR examples of injustice which members of the group have experienced and are willing to share, to discuss the questions below.

An 18-year-old schoolgirl has been deported by the Home Office as a failed asylum seeker, weeks before she was due to take her A Levels.

The Home Office ... [took] this vulnerable girl away from her family ... [and placed her] alone, in Yarl's Wood Detention Centre, for six weeks during December and January (including Christmas and New Year), and again for two weeks in March.

...Three times, she was put through the ordeal of suddenly being told that she would be deported imminently. On the first occasion she was driven to Gatwick in a van, only to be turned around at the last minute and returned to the detention centre. On the second, she was informed at the eleventh hour that the decision had been reversed - both confusing and distressing events in themselves. On the third instance, escorted by five guards, she was placed on a flight from Heathrow, seated in an isolated position in the plane, and flown to a country where, as far as our authorities were concerned, there was no-one to meet her.'

*Report in Church Times, April 2014*

- We live in an age in which human rights figure large. But whose rights are the most to be respected?
- How have other people responded when they've felt disillusioned or disempowered? What has enabled them to do something positive?
- What attitudes and behaviours (personal and corporate) help us to become responsible citizens?

*Next week we will look at wealth, exploitation and the use of money.*

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## **Closing**

Lord God,  
in Jesus, you came in the body  
flesh of our flesh, bone of our bone...  
We thank you that you did not remain an idea,  
even a religious idea,  
but walked, wept, and washed feet among us.  
By your love,  
change our ideas, especially our religious ideas,  
into living signs of your work and will.

**Through our lives and by our prayers,  
your kingdom come.**

Lord God,  
in Jesus your body was broken  
by the cowardly and the powerful.  
The judgement hall of Pilate  
knew your silence as surely  
as your critics knew your voice.  
In word and silence  
take on the powerful of the world today:  
those whose word sentences some to cruelly

or unremitting redundancy;  
those whose word transfers wealth or weapons  
for the sake of profit or prejudice;  
those whose silence condones the injustice  
they have the power to change.

O Saviour of the poor, liberate your people.

**Through our lives and by our prayers,  
your kingdom come.**

*From A Wee Worship Book, Iona Community, 1989*

## Week Three

### Can we blame it all on the bankers?

#### Opening

#### Gathering prayer:

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*Canadian Indian Liturgical text*

#### Readings:

I will tell you the secret to getting rich on Wall Street. You try to be greedy when others are fearful. And you try to be fearful when others are greedy.

*Warren Buffett*

The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains.

*1 Timothy 6, 10*

God thundered again and again through the prophets that worship in the context of mistreatment of the poor and disadvantaged is an outrage.

*Ronald J Sider*

*Optional music: Can't buy me love, The Beatles*

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1 Read

*Amos 2, 6-8*

*Amos 3, 10-11*

*Amos 5, 10-12*

*Amos 8, 4-6.*

What in particular do you think lies behind Amos' denunciations?

What would Amos be highlighting in our own society?

3 ***Letter to the Daily Mirror, 19 Feb 2014, signed by 27 Anglican Bishops***

Britain is the world's seventh largest economy and yet people are going hungry. Half a million people have visited foodbanks in the UK since last Easter and 5,500 people were admitted to hospital in the UK for malnutrition last year.

One in five mothers report regularly skipping meals to better feed their children, and even more families are just one unexpected bill away from waking up with empty cupboards.

We often hear talk of hard choices. Surely few can be harder than that faced by the tens of thousands of older people who must "heat or eat" each winter, harder than those faced by families whose wages have stayed flat while food prices have gone up 30% in just five years.

Yet beyond even this we must, as a society, face up to the fact that over half of people using foodbanks have been put in that situation by cut backs to and failures in the benefit system, whether it be payment delays or punitive sanctions.

We call on government to do its part: acting to investigate food markets that are failing, to make sure that work pays, and to ensure that the welfare system provides a robust last line against hunger.

What values does society need to ensure that everyone has the same opportunities to flourish?

4 Does money itself have a moral nature (or just how we use it)?

*'Roger McCormick of the London School of Economics tells a story to bankers and others at his seminars. Imagine you are on one side of a transaction, and you notice that your counterparty has made a serious mistake, which they have not noticed. The result of the mistake is that you will do much better out of the transaction than you would have done if the other side had not made their mistake.'*

*What do you do? Keep silent and pocket the profit, or point out the mistake – and get what you would reasonably have expected to get out of the transaction, but no more?*

*Today, McCormick has said, many of those, to whom he puts the story, find it difficult to answer. It might be thought that their chief objective is to make money, to maximise profit. It is not part of their objective to do this in an ethical way. Instead, their only thought of ethical considerations is whether they will, by acting in a particular way, lay themselves open to regulatory sanction. The criterion is not whether it is bad to do something, but whether a policeman will catch me if I do it.'*

<http://hughdbryant.co.uk/2014/07/21/the-conduct-costs-project-description-and-suggested-prescription/>

- What makes people poor / wealthy? What can we do about this?
- What should Christians say about matters such as the minimum wage, the living wage and zero hours contracts?

5 Where does the category of fairness fit in? Is it just a childish response or the root of justice in society?

6 What would a “Just Society” for our nation in the next five years look like? What would the group’s five priorities be?

7 What sort of questions arising from today’s session should we be asking politicians at the moment?

*Next week we shall ask questions about where God is in our world, and how we 'read' the world from a Christian perspective.*

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## **Closing**

Two readings from Luke's Gospel

A certain ruler asked Jesus, 'Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?' Jesus said to him, 'Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: "You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; Honour your father and mother." ' He replied, 'I have kept all these since my youth.' When Jesus heard this, he said to him, 'There is still one thing lacking. Sell all that you own and distribute the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.' But when he heard this, he became sad; for he was very rich. Jesus looked at him and said, 'How hard it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God! Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.'

Those who heard it said, 'Then who can be saved?' He replied, 'What is impossible for mortals is possible for God.'

*Luke 18, 18-26*

Then Jesus told them a parable: 'The land of a rich man produced abundantly. And he thought to himself, "What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?" Then he said, "I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry." But God said to him, "You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?" So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich towards God.'

*Luke 12, 16-21*

## **Week Four**

### **Where is God? *How do we read our world?***

#### **Opening**

##### **Gathering prayer:**

Let us sit side by side

sharing the same bread drawn from the same source

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*Canadian Indian Liturgical text*

#### **Reading:**

You might think that, by now, people would have become accustomed to the idea of natural catastrophes. We live on a planet that is still cooling and which has fissures and faults in its crust; this much is accepted even by those who think that the globe is only six thousand years old, as well as by those who believe that the earth was "designed" to be this way. Even in such a case, it is to be expected that earthquakes will occur and that, if they occur under the seabed, tidal waves will occur also. Yet two sorts of error are still absolutely commonplace. The first of these is the idiotic belief that seismic events are somehow "timed" to express the will of God. Thus, reasoning back from the effect, people will seriously attempt to guess what sin or which profanity led to the verdict of the tectonic plates. The second error, common even among humanists, is to borrow the same fallacy for satirical purposes and to employ it to disprove a benign deity.

*Christopher Hitchens*

*Optional music: Why did you ignore me? John L Bell.*

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Begin by discussing the following texts in smaller groups, using the following questions.

- What is going on here and why?
- What was the prophet saying to the people of Israel?
- What relevance does this have today?

*Amos 3, 12-15*

*Amos 4, 1-3*

*Amos 4, 9-11*

*Amos 5, 4-8*

*Amos 6, 14*

*Amos 8, 11-12*

*Amos 9, 5-10*

### **Questions for general discussion**

- 1 Who does Amos reckon is 'in charge' and brings disaster? How do we react to that?
- 2 Have there ever been times in your life when you have made connections between a 'disaster' (whether personal or otherwise) and something you or others have done? Perhaps there have been times when you have thought "What have I (we) done to deserve this?" How do such experiences relate to our understanding of God?
- 3 Amos suggested that God would bring disaster on Israel because their worship and their lives were not pleasing to God. What (if anything) do we understand by God's judgement on society today?
- 4 Amos is one of the first to see God bringing about judgement on Israel through other nations (with other religions). What does a prophetic voice say about how we respond to such incidents and

about our failure as a society or a nation to love and care for one another and for other nations? You might like to consider some of the situations listed below or others that come to mind:

- Russia and Ukraine
- Syria and Iraq
- The rise of Islamic State
- The Ferguson shooting and the backlash there
- The effects of austerity measures on the poorest people in society.

- 5 Amos talks about 'God's sanctions' on Israel for not being faithful to the covenant (eg Amos 4, 13-15). What are the strengths and weaknesses of the ways in which our society uses sanctions? What do you think a prophetic stance would be about these uses of sanctions?
- 6 During the coming week, think about what the response of society should be to the issues we have been discussing today, and what sort of society we want to build.

*Next week we shall look at whether and how we build hope in a fractured world through the people we celebrate.*

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## **Closing**

If there is righteousness in the heart,  
there will be beauty in the character.  
If there is beauty in the character,  
there will be harmony in the home.  
If there is harmony in the home,  
there will be order in the nation.  
If there is order in the nation,  
there will be peace in the world.  
So let it be.

*Scottish blessing*

You are the peace of all things calm  
You are the place to hide from harm  
You are the light that shines in dark  
You are the heart's eternal spark  
You are the door that's open wide  
You are the guest who waits inside  
You are the stranger at the door  
You are the calling of the poor  
You are my Lord and with me still  
You are my love, keep me from ill  
You are the light, the truth, the way  
You are my Saviour this very day.

*Celtic oral tradition - 1st millennium*

## Week Five

### Who do we celebrate? *Building hope in a fractured world.*

#### Opening

##### Gathering prayer:

Let us sit side by side  
sharing the same bread drawn from the same source  
to quiet the same hunger than makes us weak.

Then standing together  
let us share the same spirit, same thoughts,  
that once again draw us together in friendship and unity and peace.

*Canadian Indian Liturgical text*

#### Readings:

Hope is being able to see that there is light despite all of the darkness.

*Desmond Tutu*

You may not always have a comfortable life and you will not always be able to solve all of the world's problems at once but don't ever underestimate the importance you can have because history has shown us that courage can be contagious and hope can take on a life of its own.

*Michelle Obama*

It is better to lead from behind and to put others in front, especially when you celebrate victory when nice things occur. You take the front line when there is danger. Then people will appreciate your leadership.

*Nelson Mandela*

*Optional music: Anthem, Leonard Cohen.*

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1 Read

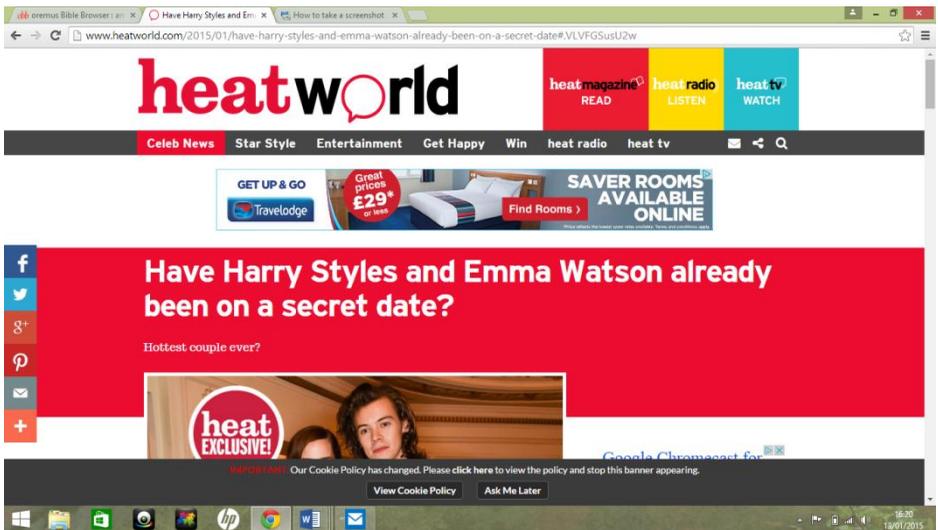
*Amos 5, 21-24*

*Amos 6, 4-8*

*Amos 8, 13-14*

2 Look at the extract from the internet and then talk about

- What lies behind the cult of celebrity? Why do we value it? What does it give to society?
- What are the marks of true celebrity?
- What qualities matter to us in those we choose to follow? How should this affect our attitude to our political leaders?



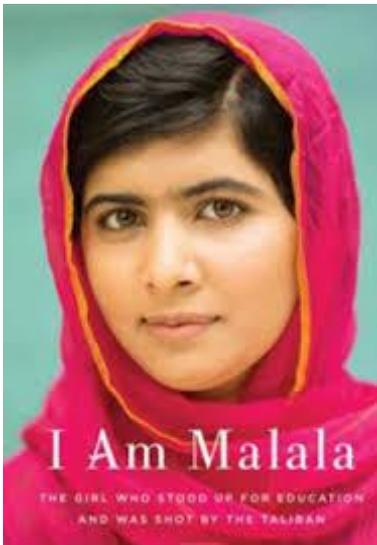
Hemma is on! It looks a helluva lot like Harry Styles and Emma Watson have already been on a date! The insanely good looking pair were spotted at the Manchester United vs Newcastle game on Boxing Day.

“They were careful not to be seen without each other,” we’re told by our spies.

“We saw Harry when he was heading to the toilets and when we went to the bookies next to the boxes, everyone was talking about them being there together.”

**And finally...**

- 3 What, if anything, gives Amos cause for hope? Read  
*Amos 7, 1-3*  
*Amos 9, 11-15.*
- 4 What else can you identify in all that we have been looking at over the last five weeks that speaks of hope either in Amos or in our thinking together?
- 5 What leadership and political direction do we need to create and establish hope?



The terrorists thought they would change my aims and stop my ambitions, but nothing changed in my life except this: weakness, fear and hopelessness died. Strength, power and courage were born.

Let us remember: one book, one pen, one child, and one teacher can change the world.

When the whole world is silent, even one voice becomes powerful.

Let us make our future now, and let us make our dreams tomorrow's reality.

- 6 As a result of this course, what questions would you want to put to candidates seeking election?
  - 7 Will we do anything differently as a result of this course?
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## Closing

We believe in Jesus Christ,  
our saviour and liberator,  
the expression of God's redeeming  
and restoring love;  
the mark of humaneness,  
source of courage, power and love;  
God of God,  
light of light,  
ground of our humanity.

We believe that God resides in slums,  
lives in broken homes and hearts,  
suffers our loneliness, rejection and powerlessness.  
But through death and resurrection  
God gives life, pride and dignity;  
provides the content of our vision,  
offers the context of our struggle,  
promises liberation  
to the oppressor and the oppressed,  
hope to those in despair,  
vision to the blind.

We believe in the activity of the Holy Spirit  
who revives our decaying soul,  
resurrects our defeated spirits,  
renews our hope of wholeness  
and reminds us of our responsibility  
in ushering in God's new order here and now.

*Yong Ting Jin, Hong Kong, 1986  
Bread of Tomorrow, p158*