Have you ever wondered why it is that people stop caring about those who are in need? Is ti it because they are greedy selfish Scrooges who are something like a cartoon caricature of the Grinch and gnarled green grumbling gremlin who only wants to steal joy.....or is there something more human afoot. I’d bet the second option. Could it be that greed and indifference are brought about not just because of selfishness....but also disappointment and despair? Lets see if the readings can help us.

What is happening in the Gospel is more clear. Abraham has welcomed Lazarus the poor man into heaven. But because the rich man, called Dives (latin for ‘riches’) in the tradition, does not pay attention to the needs of his brother, he is condemned.

Amos’ context needs more explaining. Amos is the oldest recorded Biblical book and prophet that we have. Manuscripts of his prophetic text are older than any other book in the Bible and are a very simple message: If you are indifferent to those around you, you will suffer and be punished. Amos is a fellow Jew but from the southern Kingdom of Judah. From that perspective he is speaking and writing to the people of the Northern Kingdom which he calls “Joseph” since many of the tribes that were prominent up north are descended of Joseph that great dreamer and protector of the Jewish people.

The elite of this time are indifferent to their people’s needs and their impending doom. The Assyrian armies were already circling Judea by this point and these northern Israelites were counting down the days that had left. While doing so they party, essentially, and keep wasting spending like there is no tomorrow. In so doing they are not just taking from those who have little, but they are, and this is the key phrase:

"...t*hey are not made ill by the collapse of Joseph!*  
 Therefore, now they shall be the first to go into exile,  
 and their wanton revelry shall be done away with.

Amos simply wants to move their hearts to pain, to disgust with their own waste, and to compassion and justice for their fellow countrymen.

“Amos’ call to true worship is to “let justice flow like a river, and righteousness like a never-failing stream” from Amos 5 . Tsedaqah, or “righteousness,” refers to a standard of right, equitable relationship between people no matter their social differences. And mishpat, or “justice,” refers to concrete actions you take to correct injustice and create righteousness.”[[1]](#footnote-10629)

This leads directly into Jesus’ arresting parable in which he challenges Dives to realize that he had been complicit in his own ignorance, morally at fault in his own turning away of his attention to the people right around him in proximity who he could actually and reasonably help.

If we come to know that there is suffering in our community, how do we react? If we come to see the lack of justice in some sphere of our state or society, how do we respond? If we have those who seek refuge in our borders legally, or if we know those who are already here and are our neighbors regardless of their status, what do we do? And if our neigboring states undergo some disaster or need, how do we see that justice and righteousness are restored to them?

Jesus’ parable to us is a powerful one, because he calls not just to the rich, not just to Dives, but to us all, to look out our doors to notice the neighbor in need whom we had not seen before.

1. https://bibleproject.com/guides/book-of-amos/ [↑](#footnote-ref-10629)