

# Amos The LORD Roars

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Date: 11 June 2017

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[ 0 : 00 ] Sigmund Freud, the Austrian neurologist, now known as the father of psychoanalysis, believed that all of the world's problems came from the repression of deep desires for pleasure.

All that to do with sex was his idea. And therefore, for him, the villains in society are the repressive moral gatekeepers.

And particularly, he had his sights on the Christian church. People need to be free to do whatever they want to do. Unlike Freud, however, the Christian worldview doesn't locate the problems of this world in one part of the world or in one group of people in the world.

That is, Christianity doesn't blame religion for all the world's problems. It doesn't blame Muslim terrorists. It doesn't blame atheists. It doesn't blame big business. It doesn't blame immigrants. It doesn't blame Donald Trump or anything like that. It locates the problem of this world, the universal problem, as sin. It's rejection of God, the creator God.

[ 1 : 08 ] And it locates a solution to the world's problems in the same God's gracious actions towards his rebellious creation. That is, the Christian worldview declares both a universal solution and a universal problem, or a universal problem with a universal solution.

And in this series in Amos, which we're launching into now, I'll be mentioning some core Christian beliefs that are connected to that worldview, which are repulsive to the average human ear.

Sin, divine judgment, and in fact, even God's solution to the problem, that being the person of Jesus, are some of the most offensive elements of the Christian faith today.

A good number of our society still believe in God. So don't believe the new atheists who say that most people are atheists. That's not true. Most people believe in God.

Four out of five people in this world still believe in God. Most, however, have arrived in their own minds at a God of love who supports them no matter how they live.

[ 2 : 20 ] That's the job of God. His job is to support me. And so a survey of believers in the United States, this is Christian. These are Christian Bible-believing guys in the United States, 2006.

Only 31.5% of them believed in a God who would actually hold people accountable. One third of them. Two thirds of them, these are Bible-believing Christians in the United States.

Two thirds of them came up with a concept that God's never going to hold us accountable. That's a God that they'd formed in their own minds. One person commented, I like to think of a kind God.

A nice old man with a beard who wouldn't hurt anyone. The New Testament God who's a God of love and forgiveness and mercy and nice stuff. That's pleasant, isn't it?

And that's a common view. It's like you've got the Old Testament God, he's kind of a bit nasty. So Richard Dawkins and all those kind of guys say, you know, God's just a bully.

[ 3 : 24 ] And then New Testament God, he kind of grew up. Kind of got over the nasty stuff and became a God of love in the New Testament. The question is, where do they get this concept that God is love?

Because you can't look at the world. And you can't look at history. And in fact, you can't even look at any of the major religions in this world and declare that God is love.

There is no religion outside of biblical Christianity that says that God created this world out of love and out of delight. Not one.

Christianity is the only one. The source of the idea that God is love is the Bible itself. There's no other source for that except Christian scriptures.

And the Bible tells us that the God of love is also a God of judgment who will make all things in this world which has gone terribly wrong, will make it all right in the end.

[ 4 : 26 ] And I want to suggest as we launch into this series that until we understand the fierce judgment and anger of God, we will never grasp the beauty and the wonder and the depth of his

grace, his mercy and his love.

Minimize the justice of God and you minimize the grace of God. Gut one, you gut the other. See, what if the nature of God is to be deeply moved to anger by injustice?

Wouldn't you actually want that? I mean, you look at this world, the messiest world. You know, when you stop to think of it, don't you really want a God who is in fact enraged by the injustices in this world at the moment?

And that's the God we meet at the beginning of the book of Amos. The God who roars. Look at verse 2. It says, The Lord roars from Zion and thunders from Jerusalem.

So the very first thing that comes out of Amos' mouth is an image of God who is a lion on the prowl. A lion who's roaring. Now, lions can be 1.2 meters high, 3 meters long, weigh 200 kilos, can run it for a short distance up to 80 kilometers an hour, and have got paws the size of shovels.

[ 5 : 51 ] They're meant to be a fearsome beast. They are the king of the beasts. And when you're confronted with one, awe is the picture. A number of years ago, I was in Singapore, and I was visiting the baboons in the, not specifically visiting them.

I was going through the zoo, and I came to the baboon section. And I, I shouldn't really tell you this, but anyway, the first thing I did was I found this banana.

And so I got this banana, and I hooked it into the baboons. And when you've got 60 baboons and one banana, it's, it's entertainment is what it is. It's fantastic. But anyway, I moved on from that, and there's this baboon.

And now baboons have got big teeth, and they're a fairly fearsome kind of beast, right? This baboon is there behind the glass, big glass panel, this sort of viewing area, and this baboon's sitting there in the corner doing what baboons do, you know, licking itself or scratching itself or something.

And so I get down, and I get eye contact with this baboon. And I'm just staring it down just to see what will happen and see whether or not I can get this thing stirred up at all. And, and it's kind of glancing at me, and I'm staring at it, and it's glancing at me.

[ 7 : 04 ] And it's going back, doing it, it's glancing at me. And then all of a sudden, it just stopped, and it just, I got eye contact with this baboon. And all of a sudden, I don't know what it did, but it snapped, and it just launched itself at the glass, right to me where I was, and bang, it hit the glass, and I fell backwards, much to the amusement of this Japanese tourist which were all there.

I was scared of baboon. So a couple of weeks later, I'm at Taronga Zoo, and I thought I'd do the same thing for the lions and see what happens. And a lion's walking past, so I'm trying to get eye contact with the lion and stare it down.

And just in one moment, it stopped, and it looked at me. And it's like this far away from me through the glass. And I'm like, okay, it's time to go and see the tigers now. You know, like, I was so, I mean, there's a big, thick panel of glass there.

And even in that moment, it's like, oh my goodness, my heart started pounding. These are fearsome animals. So you can imagine, you know, Amos here, he's not a professional prophet. Very first verses tell us that he's a shepherd, and he's out there as a shepherd, taking care of his sheep.

And he hears a lion roar in the distance. And it's dark. He's got his sheep, and he's armed with a really big, effective weapon, like a big stick.

[ 8 : 22 ] And in that moment, he gets scared. He gets scared. That's the picture of God that we're meant to have as we launch into Amos.

See, Amos is here minding his own business down in the southern village of Tekoa, looking after his sheep and his fig trees, and God pushes him into action.

He's not a professional prophet. Pastoral search committee looking for a senior pastor would not be very interested or impressed by this dude's credentials. But God doesn't see what we see.

His job is to preach a message of God's judgment to the north. Now, it's really helpful as we jump into these early parts of Amos to understand that at this point, we're dipping into the Old Testament story towards the end of it.

Halfway through the story, the kingdom of Israel has split. After King Solomon, there's a civil war because of the sin of Solomon. And instead of a united Israel, what we now have is a split Israel.

[ 9 : 28 ] There's Israel to the north and there's Judah to the south. Kind of like Tasmania and the rest of Australia kind of thing. Little guys down the south who've got a chip on their shoulder and the rest of the country.

Now, except in this case, there's blood which has been spilt and there's a simmering tension. Not right at this particular moment. They've had a relatively amount of peace for about 20 years. But right here, there's still this simmering tension. So the two tribes down to the south, they're known as Judah. They're only small. There's only two of them of the original 12. But they've got the temple and they've got Jerusalem. And 10 tribes in the north, they've kept naming rights. You know, they haven't got the temple, they haven't got Jerusalem. They've got naming rights.

So they're still called Israel. And they've got this breakaway altar at Bethel where they bring their sacrifices. And we'll pop back into that in the coming weeks. And so into this simmering tension comes Amos from the south with a word especially for Bethel and the northern tribes.

[10:35] He would not have been well received coming from the south, a shepherd and a shepherd from this little village. But Amos is no fool.

He almost has their attention right from the very beginning as he launches into this. Because what he does is he starts to pronounce judgment on Israel's neighbors.

He mentions six of them in the first couple of chapters. And there's a repeated pattern. Each judgment starts exactly the same way. Chapter 1 in verse 3, verse 6, verse 9, 11, 13.

And chapter 2, verse 1 with this is what the Lord says. This is the God proclaiming judgment on these nations. The God that these nations did not know.

And in each judgment, we see God saying, For three sins of whoever it is, even for four, I will not relent.

[11:35] In other words, God has been keeping a very careful record and account of all the sins of these nations. He's got them numbered.

The evidence is all there. He sees it all and nothing escapes his attention. And then comes, in each case, a description of their sins. So Damascus, they're treating people as if they have no worth. Gaza, treating people for profit. Tyre, breaking a word against a brother in order to use him for profit. Edom, unrestrained hatred and spite towards a brother. Ammon, ambition and uncontrolled violence against the helpless.

What's described here in these six nations is war crimes and human rights abuses. Take Damascus. We'll just pick on Damascus for a moment. What's Damascus done?

The second half of verse 3 says, Because she threshed Gilead with sledges having iron teeth. Back in those days, these have these big, heavy machines that had these iron teeth, which were curved upwards, that were dragged across the harvested crops.

[12:51] And the idea was that it would split out the grains from the straw and all the other rubbish. And the picture here is what's happened is that Damascus or the Arameans have got these huge bits of gear.

They've hooked them up to their beasts and they've laid their captives, their enemies' prostate on the ground and they've dragged these machines across the top of them and slaughtered them in the most despicable way imaginable.

It's an atrocity. It's a war crime. There's no mercy. These people were treated like objects.

And so what will God do about it? Verse 4, I will send fire upon the house of Hazei that will consume the fortress of Ben-Hadad. I will break down the gate of Damascus. I will destroy the king who is in the valley of Avon.

All six of these nations are guilty of war crimes against humanity. And the penalty is in every case, it says God will destroy them by fire. It's an Old Testament picture of the judgment of God.

[13:59] It's normally judgment of God in the Old Testament is normally described as fire. So if you're looking at a map here, we'd notice that every one of Israel's neighbors is going to be judged by God and it's going to burn.

And the picture here for Israel coming out of the mouth of Amos is, guys, you're going to look around and you're just going to see smoke everywhere. They're going to burn. You're going to be judged.

And Israel would have been listening to this from this prophet from the south and gone, actually, that's great.

We've had problems with these people for ages. Good on you, God. Yes. Wicked pagans. Destroy them all. Let justice be done.

At the very least, these pronouncers are reminded that God is sovereign over all nations and all people. Even though they didn't have the word of God, they weren't without moral responsibility, even though they didn't have direct knowledge of God, but they did have direct accountability to God.

[15:08] Even though they might not have the law of God written in tablets of stone, they did have the law of God written on their consciences. But that's not the case for Judah.

You can maybe feel the crowd go just a little bit silent at this point in Amos 2, verse 4, when Amos says, For three sins of Judah, even for four, I will not relent or I will not turn back my wrath. Now, Amos is probably most likely won over his audience at this point until he starts, Judah? That's a little bit close to home. Israel expected God to be angry with the neighbours for all their atrocities, but now he's talking about the people of God.

And look at the charges. You see, the human rights abusers get God riled, no matter who does it. But this is different. This bit's personal. Judah has the words of God's covenant and they have ignored it.

Back in Deuteronomy, God said to his people, Make sure that when I take you into the promised land, that you don't go following other gods, or I'm going to throw you out of the promised land, frankly.

[16:29] And look at what Judah's done. Chapter 2, verse 4, See, there's one thing that really angers God.

It's when his covenant people, his special people devote themselves to gods of wood and stone and gold and plastic and metal and brick and cement. When they become just like the people around them.

Judah has had a history of God's revealed presence and his mighty deeds in their midst. They've got a history of it. They also have a history of the prophets who proclaim God's word to them. And yet what we see here is having God's word is no substitute for embracing God's word and the God behind his word. Judah had it.

They had the word of God, but they didn't embrace it. And God's going to judge Judah as well, just like the rest. Now, it must have been tempting, I think, at this point for Amos to go, that's the final point of my sermon.

[17:38] Must have been so tempted to stop here. If he did, he could have possibly been the most popular preacher in all the nation. And I think, potentially, Israel expected him to stop at this point too, because they've heard a pronouncement at this point, of seven nations.

And the astute Israelite would know that the biblical number for completion is the number seven. But the message of Amos, and in fact, the whole Bible, is that no one misses out.

2 Corinthians 5.10 says, You see, Amos had made the journey from Tekoa in the south up to the north, not primarily to bring a message of God's anger to all of Israel's neighbours, but to bring it to Israel itself.

The kind of things listed from chapter 2, verse 6 onwards, is exactly what God told them not to do. There's abuse of power. The first half of verse 6. Sorry, second half of verse 6.

They sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals. The idea was that a sandal was used as a symbol of exchange in a property deal.

[19:03] That'd be pretty good, wouldn't it, nowadays? You take your boot off, and here you go. I'll buy that house. Here goes my shoe. It'd be awesome. And what it's saying here is that the poor were being exploited by the rich in property deals and other financial transactions.

Verse 7. They trampled on the heads of the poor as upon the dust of the ground and denied justice to the oppressed. They abused power. Legal protection was only for the rich. And they thought that God didn't notice.

They turned up to the altar each week. It's like they went to church week in and week out. They brought their offerings. They sang their praises. They did their prayers. And they thought that everything was okay.

And look what happens in verse 7 while they are there. Second half verse 7. Father and son use the same girl and go and so profane my holy name. They lie down beside every altar on garments pledged, taken in pledge.

In the house of their God, they drink wine taken as fines. It's a picture of debauchery. Debauchery at church. Deuteronomy says that if a poor man has to give his cloak over, the only cloak that he

owns as a security for a debt, he owes a debt.

[ 20 : 20 ] And what he had to do is he had to take his coat off and give it to the bloke as a security for the debt. The word of God said in Deuteronomy, don't hang on to the cloak overnight because the bloke might get cold and he's got nothing to sleep on.

And here it is. It says that they kept it. And not only did they keep it, instead of returning it to the poor person, they kept the cloaks and all the cloaks that they kept, all the ones that they confiscated from the poor people, they piled them up in front of the altar and father and son rolled around with prostitutes on them so they didn't mess up their own jackets.

It says here as well that Israel had silenced the prophets. They had mocked the vows of the Nazarites who vowed not to drink alcohol, not to cut their hair.

Samson was one of those. And the Israelites laughed at those vows and they forced them to have alcohol. When the prophets spoke, the Israelites said, we don't want to hear it.

We don't want to hear from God. And so verse 13, God says, Israel is going to be flattened. Now then I will crush you as a cart crushes when loaded with grain. The swift will not escape.

[ 21 : 41 ] The strong will not muster their strength and the warrior will not save his life. The archer will not stand his ground. The fleet-footed soldier will not get away and the horseman will not save his life.

Even the bravest warriors will flee naked on that day, declares the Lord. It's one thing for Israel to point the finger at their neighbours and say, pagans, celebrate their judgment.

This word is for them. You see, privilege brings responsibility. Israel was in a very privileged position. God loved Israel in a way that he didn't love the other nations around and in a way that they certainly didn't deserve.

You see, the back story to all this is the covenant relationship that God had established with Israel. It's described in Deuteronomy chapter 9. I'll read it to you.

It says, It's not because of your righteousness or your integrity that you're going to take possession of this land, but on account of the wickedness of these nations, the Lord your God will drive them out before you.

[ 23 : 03 ] It's accomplished what he swore to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Understand then, it is not because of your righteousness that the Lord your God is giving you this land, good land to possess, for you are a stiff-necked people.

I want to make it really clear, you're not better than anyone else. You're no different. And so the picture here at the beginning of Deuteronomy is that of a wedding ceremony and it's a major mismatch.

It's one of those weddings, which you may or may not have been to, where the people are nodding and prodding with each other and whispering and going, What on earth does he see in her?

It's one of those kind of weddings. That's what's happening here. There is nothing special about Israel and yet God has, in an incomprehensible way, chosen to love these people.

And it's this special love story which stands behind what's written here in chapter 3, verse 1. Hear this word, people of Israel, the word of the Lord has spoken against you, against the whole family.

[ 24 : 11 ] I brought you up out of Egypt. You only have I chosen of all the families of the earth. Therefore, I will punish you for your sins. God rescued them and he loved them and he'd been patient with them with all of their waywardness.

But he said, Enough's enough. Enough's enough. It's hard for us to hear about a God like this.

Though on the other hand, we don't want a God who doesn't get rolled by rapists and people traffickers and perpetrators of genocide and things like that.

God's patience has run out for Israel because of their disregard of each other. So it's not just all the big crimes. It's not just war crimes and crimes against humanity.

This is because of the way they've treated each other. It's the way that they've treated the poor and the oppressed. How do you think Israel responded to this message?

They ignored it. They actually ignored it. Why? Because things were good and they just assumed because things were good it was because God was blessing them. Life was better than it had been for a couple of hundred years.

[ 25 : 27 ] Religion was flourishing. There was no... I mean, it's not surprising. Everyone wanted to be at church. You know, it was... Religion was flourishing. There was no military threats.

Finances were fantastic. There was wealth. In fact, it was so wealthy that people were buying multiple holiday houses. We'll see that in the coming weeks. Thought they had God in their pocket and they could live how they pleased.

We're the people of God. What's there to worry about? And even when God sent his prophet to warn them, they would not listen. You can just imagine the response.

Oh, Amos. You're taking things a little bit too far. Come on, man. Loosen up. No one believes in the judgment of God anymore. This is 750 BC, man.

Get with the times. Our grandparents believed that. Not nowadays. Yes. Here's a bit of serpent theology that often infects our minds.

[ 26 : 30 ] It's the thinking that God won't do what he says he will do. Remember Genesis 3, Garden of Eden. Serpent comes in and attempts Eve to eat the fruit.

And she remembers God's warning and says, No, no, no. If I do that, I will die. And the serpent mocks it. Ah, no. You're not going to die.

Don't believe it. God's not going to hold you accountable. He's a God who delivers on his promises to bring not just mercy, but also to bring justice. And he's not a God to be trifled with.

In 734 BC, Damascus was destroyed by the Assyrians. You can see that in 2 Corinthians 16.9.

Gaza was destroyed in 734 by the Assyrians as well.

Judah was destroyed by Babylon between 597 and 588 BC. Edom rejoiced at that point. They rejoiced at the fall of Judah, but they fell to the Arabs in the 5th century.

[ 27 : 33 ] Tyre thought it was impregnable. They had this little sort of city fortress just off the coast. Sort of sea was in between and they thought it was impregnable.

Alexander the Great came along in 333 BC, built a ramp to Tyre over the ocean, walked over the walls and destroyed the place. What happened to Israel?

Israel was taken little by little until the capital of Samaria was all that was left. And then in 722 BC, 28 years after Amos spoke, the final judgment came.

You can see that in 2 Kings 17.5 and 7. Tiglath-Pileser III. They thought it was a good enough name to name their children in several generations.

Tiglath-Pileser III, the Assyrian king, came from the north. He destroyed Israel. This is the man who boasted one of his conquests where he said, I slit the wombs of the pregnant women.

[ 28 : 36 ] I gouged out the eyes of the infants and I cut the throats of the young men. God handed Israel over to Tiglath-Pileser III.

Tens of thousands of Israelites were violently driven from their homes, taken into captivity, and those people never re-entered world history again. Israel, 10 tribes of Israel, destroyed, gone. Never came back. God said he would do it and he did 28 years later. I think what we're meant to get here from Amos is that this God is not a safe one.

It is unwise to mistake God's patience for his weakness or a lack of resolve. Don't make the mistake of thinking he hasn't so he won't. Or I've got away with it so I will get away with it.

Be careful of complacency. The lion roars and the prophet speaks. So let's us who have the word of God in front of us make sure we're listening.

[ 29 : 44 ] We should ask the question. We see it there eight times. I will not relent. I will not relent. I will not relent.

That is, I will not turn back my wrath. I will not turn back my wrath. You've got to ask yourself the question, is there any way that he possibly would or possibly could? What would it take for God to relent?

What would it take for him to turn back his wrath? See, in the death and resurrection of Jesus, we see that God, in fact, does turn back his wrath and that he has turned back his wrath and that he will turn back his wrath.

That's what it takes. It takes the cross of Christ where God's justice and his mercy meet. His white, hot anger is poured out on the person of the Lord Jesus.

The Old Testament says, cursed is anyone who hangs on a tree and God places himself under his own curse, takes his own white, hot anger. His righteous anger is righteously satisfied.

[ 30 : 49 ] Jesus places himself under God's wrath, not for his sin or his rebellion, but for ours. 2 Corinthians 5.11 makes the exchange clear for us as God made him who had no sin to be sin for us so that in him and what he's done, we might become the righteousness of God.

We might have a right standing before God. Not because we're righteous just like Israel in Deuteronomy 9, not because we're righteous but because we are wicked, not because we deserve God's blessing, but because he longs for us to enjoy it in spite of who we are and what we've done. Psalm 2. Psalm 2 summarizes the message of defeat of these nations around Israel quite memorably. It says, Therefore you kings, be wise, be warned you rulers of the earth, serve the Lord with fear and rejoice with trembling.

Kiss the Son, lest he be angry and you be destroyed in your way for his wrath can flare up in any moment. Blessed are all who take refuge in him.

Our refuge is in Jesus, the Son of God. Ironically, our refuge is in the lion who roars.

[ 32 : 13 ] That's the irony. Our refuge is the same God who is angry with our sin. He took our place, atoned for our sins, carried our guilt so that we do not have to face the fate of, that these nations faced.

Christ, the same cross that reveals the awesome justice of God is the same cross that reveals the incredible patience and goodness and generosity of God as the just anger of God is satisfied in the death of Jesus.

Our sin is that serious. Look at the cross and be reminded of the seriousness of your sin and the awesome justice of God.

to think of ourselves in any other way regardless of how long we've been Christian or how long we've been sermon at church is to make the mistake that Israel's doing right here in the time of Amos and that is not to hear the word of God.

To be comfortable, to be complacent, to go, well, right, things aren't that bad. I think of people worse than I am. If we believe in the Son, God's wrath is turned aside.

[ 33 : 27 ] It gets focused onto Jesus. If we reject Jesus, His anger stays on us which doesn't mean for a moment that if you are sheltering behind Jesus that you have any room of complacency whatsoever.

John 15 verses 1 and 2 says, I am the true vine and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit while every branch that does bear fruit He prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.

And then down in verse 6 it says, If you do not remain in me, which means if you do not obey me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers and such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.

Jesus is speaking to His disciples at that point. Don't blame you sin. Don't excuse it. Privilege brings responsibility and repentance is needed here which means walking away from the vengeful acts of Moab and the exploitation of Gaza.

It means being people of mercy and compassion because that is what we've experienced from God. This is such a connection between Amos and what we've just walked through with Love Thy Neighbor for the last five or six weeks or whatever it is.

[ 34 : 38 ] Being a Christian is not about rituals or belonging to a social group or having a spare time interest in religion. It demands the whole of our being, the whole of allegiance to Christ.

We cannot declare allegiance to Christ and then go on living in disobedience, willful sin because the two attitudes are mutually exclusive.

Mutually exclusive. So I think in the coming weeks Amos is going to remind us that we've got some thinking to do and how we put this stuff into practice.

It's just so easy to be lulled into not really noticing our sin and get so used to our sin, get so complacent with it, saying we're the people of God and just taking Jesus and his mercy for granted. He's in the business of forgiveness. That's what he does. So I'll give him some more stuff to forgive. A complacent lifestyle that says we're the people of God and yet ultimately serving our own comfort.

[ 35 : 39 ] This is about us. It's about how we treat each other, how we think about people. In Christ we might have shelter from God's anger but that's not a license for complacency.

1 Corinthians 10 verse 11 the Apostle Paul lists the sins and the punishments of Israel and then he says this These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us on whom the culminations of the ages have come.

So if you think you are standing firm be careful that you don't fall. The application is that we are to tremble before God.

We are to flee from our sin and find refuge in Jesus who has turned God's anger away from us. God's message of judgment in Amos is also ironically a message of his grace.

You see this message not only served as a warning to Israel but as an opportunity for Israel to repent. If God didn't if he wasn't gracious he boom no warning and it is giving him an opportunity to repent to be restored to come back in repentance and if you're sitting here and you still got breath in your lungs and you can still hear me speak and you still can see me God is patient with you right now and he's patient with me.

[ 37 : 14 ] Every day you've got every breath you've got left in your life with breath in your lungs is a day where his patience is still with you and he's got an opportunity to repent. If we seek to live in obedience we will often fail we will often fall but if our lives are characterized by repentance by trust by obedience God turns towards us in compassion and mercy and the lion who roars becomes our safe refuge.

Amen.