

Gilbert **Scott-Heron** (April 1, 1949 – May 27, 2011) was an American African jazz poet, singer, musician, and author known for his work as a spoken-word performer in ...

A junkie walking through the twilight
I'm on my way home
I left three days ago, but no one seems to know I'm gone
Home is where the hatred is
Home is filled with pain and it,
Might not be such a bad idea if I never, never went home again

Stand as far away from me as you can and ask me why
Hang on to your rosary beads
Close your eyes to watch me die
You keep saying, kick it, quit it, kick it, quit it
God, but did you ever try
To turn your sick soul inside out
So that the world, so that the world
Can watch you die

Home is where I live inside my white powder dreams
Home was once an empty vacuum that's filled now with my silent screams
Home is where the needle marks
Try to heal my broken heart
And it might not be such a bad idea if I never, if I never went home again
Home again
Home again
Home again
Kick it, quit it
Kick it, quit it
Kick it, quit it
Kick it, can't go home again

Amos's message consistently warned of the power of God's judgment for greed and corruption and the dire consequences of disobedience. He told his listeners that the likely neighboring countries, Damascus, Aram, Edom, and Moab-would be punished for their transgressions and that their closeness, geographical or tribal, would not protect them. But the potential of judgment was also there for God's chosen people. For me, the idea of being chosen leads to the "inevitable conclusion.....perhaps that we have been favored because we are better." But "the prophet Amos says, to those who are chosen then and now, that God holds you responsible and you can't escape that responsibility either in fear or in nationalism or any arrogance or pride or might, majesty, strength or wisdom, you can't escape that responsibility. So, if you try to escape the lion, you meet the bear."

Amos is calling us to individual and collective holiness; he is preaching how God Jehovah seem to be involved in the lives of everybody, all nations, and calling all who will listen to hear the word of God. This call has moved through centuries, like the Gulf Stream in the Atlantic, like the deepest and mightiest rivers. This call is not a comfortable thing. I insist that our comfortable congregations in the Episcopal Church, good and faithful Christians who think of themselves as God's people, think about Southeast East DC, the American home front, and those who

are not as favorably located as them. The idea is that the same judgment doesn't apply to them due to their favorable culture and secure pattern in American history. We do our thinking from a home where we have clean beds, all the food we can eat, and more, from a nation that is powerful and rich from a place that lets us think we are favored, safe, and chosen. But, like the people of Amos's time, we are wrong.

Do not think that hiding in our little abode, protected by our little acre, under the warmth and aegis and security of our little flag, we will be protected from the implacable nature of the divine judgment. "Thus, says the prophet," There are consequences to our actions. God has a way of measuring God's people that doesn't allow us to hide what we have done or failed to do. Justice is not something that can be compromised. Traditionally, underserving one should be treated as an attack on all. And I don't think God or human life has changed much since that time.

For instance, historically, traditionally underserved people have knelt and bowed down in front of crosses, indicting the church because, in their culture, every generation comes and kneels at the altar...praying for equity and justice.... only for their children and grandchildren to pray for the same thing. Grandchildren who continue to carry the myriad of injustices on their backs for generations,

grandchildren dragged to church by their grandparents every god-damned Sunday, and they hate it. . . . then the grandchildren asked why they had to go to church every week. I mean, they say the same thing in every sermon.

As a Deacon, I am responsible to the elders, the Grandparents, and those communities to tell this generation that 'Every man, woman, and child has to come before the Lord once a week. Not to be forgiven. Not so he could hear their prayers. Not even for them to learn from the sermon's claptrap. No. We got to get down on our knees before the Lord so he can judge us, and we can be judged.'

We must become self-conscious of ourselves before becoming aware of injustice.

Oh, you didn't see that. What if I have no sense of self-consciousness or self-awareness? If I am not an individual, then I cannot be aware of what is happening to me as an individual. And if I don't understand myself, I don't understand others. But the degree to which I become self-conscious, in that sense, is the exposure in my mind and personality to the things that happen to me.

And, of course, it is not an accident that a great sense of burning justice has arisen from me, whose ancestors' background was defined primarily in terms of being bound to the soil: foot to heal, forest, river, vines, green bush, watch for the sink hole, more vines and bush, green water, then the tree boat, lily pads, secret water door, tree hideout, more rowing and walking, tree people, zigzag through the

bush...those were the steps to free water, to get up north....but if I don't take their resilience, my birth in America, and their journey through America foretelling a site of trauma, through its wilderness- a site of rebellion, and in its promised land- a site of broken promises.

When the day of YHWH comes, I will discover that Yahweh has kept books, not only on the people who denied recognizing the resilience, resistance, and redemption of the liberation for American African people, but Yahweh kept books on me.

At any rate, Amos is talking about all the countries around Israel, particularly those who handed over a whole community of exiles, breaking a treaty of brotherhood, that they were under the judgment of Jehovah because Jehovah is eternal and is the Ground of all life and activity and is the creator of all of life.

Amos also thinks that Israel is in some unique way under the judgment of Jehovah and yet will somehow be spared because Israel knows that it is under the judgment of Jehovah. The others are under the judgment but don't know it. And that knowledge gives Israel a sense of responsibility for its actions that may not be present in the other nations.... That same responsibility for its actions applies to the episcopal church! And that knowledge gives Israel and the Episcopal church a sense of responsibility that may not be present in the other nations. So, we see

emerging in Amos the idea that will follow us down to the latest times: the idea that the measure of all human beings' moral responsibility is somehow connected; we do not know in detail how, but it is somehow connected with the knowledge, with the opportunity, with the exposure to the truth.

Like Amos, we are watching this, and he was disturbed then, but we are disturbed now. And then Amos goes back. He doesn't prophesize this the first time; he returns with what he sees burning in his mind. I wonder if they don't understand what they are doing. I don't know. Perhaps they don't or don't want to. And then the visions come...remember Amos doesn't prophesize until he gets the vision. The Lord showed me the Lord was standing beside a wall built with a plumb line, with a plumb line in his hand. And the Lord said to me, what do you see?" And I said, "A plumb line." Then the Lord said....

I see that the behavior that alienates YHWH is not identified with certain kinds of worship or worship. Instead, Amos sees and exposes religiously sanctioned failures of justice that ramify into every part of the community: the rich building the fancy houses and maintaining selected vineyards with the income they make from overtaxing the poor. Falsifying the weights and measures in the marketplace and selling off harvest refuse as high-quality grain; judges taking bribes and subverting local justice. The official religious establishment benefits from these practices,

which is why Amos reported to the Amaziah priest at the “royal shrine and government house. In verse .13.

Now, what does all this mean? It means simply this: that it is so easy for people who are religious, or for people who are secure in the pattern of their culture or their nation or their society, to feel that because of the favorable position in which they are located at a particular time interval in history, that the things, the judgments that apply to people who are not as favorably located are not tied to them.

And the prophet Amos says that even when you are sure you have escaped the bear, the snake bites. With ebbing strength and disintegrating powers, you finally have to do what God required you to do initially. While your strength was fresh and your vitality was pulsing. No! Let justice well up like fresh water; let honesty roll in like full tide.