

Faith & Values



From the Pulpit
The Rev. Dr. Wesley S. Williams Jr.

Amos applied

In this postmodern age, many revivalists are inclined to resume a search for guidance in biblical wisdom applied to current challenges, and I am among them.

For me, there is much to commend, and to be learned, from the great minor prophet Amos, who did not write much (hence he is a “minor” prophet), but in poetic form identified major ills and solutions at a critical time in our salvation history (the 8th century BCE) at a critical time today as well.

Although born and raised in the Southern Kingdom (Judah, a little south of Jerusalem) Amos preached primarily, it seems, to the Northern Kingdom (Israel, at a time that immediately preceded its destruction, by the Assyrian Empire). Amos’ warnings and recommended solution were of grave importance in the 8th century BCE; and they are of similar importance now.

What could be more relevant? In chapter 5, Amos, speaking for the Almighty, condemns, among other things, (a) unfair rendering of so-called justice without righteousness, (b) reproving on bases that are untrue

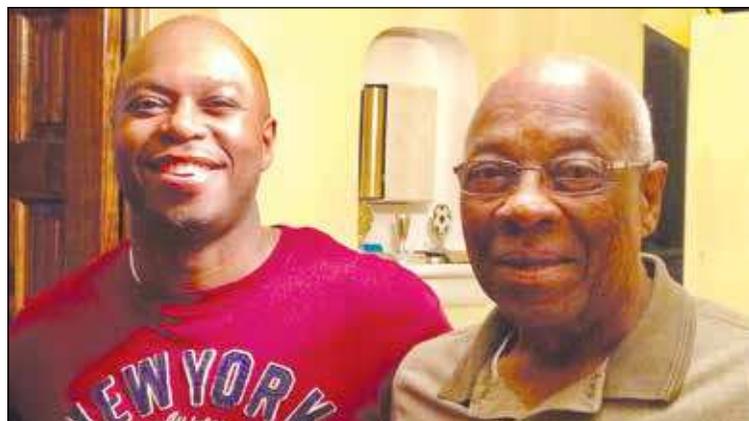
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Jackson leads volunteers in his father’s memory



Mountain Christian Church volunteers Kerry North, above left, Mike Jackson and Chris Schueler work on a home in Bordeaux on St. Thomas.

Mike Jackson, left, with his father Maurice Jackson, who worked for The Daily News and died during Hurricane Maria. In memory of his father, Mike Jackson is helping spearhead a volunteer effort through his church in Maryland to help with the recovery on St. Thomas.



By **LORI ABBOTTS**
Daily News Staff

Mike Jackson has turned his grief over the loss of his father into a legacy of action.

Jackson has pledged 1,000 volunteers to assist with hurricane recovery efforts in 2018 in his father’s memory. With the help of Mountain Christian Church in Edgewood, Md., he is steadily nearing his goal.

Jackson’s father, Maurice Jackson, was a Virgin Islands Daily News team member for many years. His death was a direct result of Hurricane Maria.

“This started with my dad’s passing away during Maria and the family coming down to lay him to rest,” said Jackson. “I witnessed the destruction, and seeing it firsthand, it’s definitely a different scene.”

When he returned to his home, he heard about the hurricane relief initiative started by Mountain Christian Church, of which he is a longtime member. They set a goal of sending 1,000 volunteers to U.S. areas affected by hurricanes Harvey, Irma and Maria in 2018.

“I saw that they included Texas and Florida and Puerto Rico, and I was shocked that they didn’t include the Virgin Islands. After making my church leadership aware of how badly the USVI

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and ignoring or even abhorring the truth when proclaiming so-called correction, (c) taxing the poor unfairly, disproportionately and heedless of their greater needs, (d) implicitly taxing too lightly, relatively speaking, the rich including oneself, (e) taking bribes or “selling” justice, and (f) favoring one’s own interests or relatively lesser needs when ruling or rendering justice (sitting “in the gate”).

Look around ourselves and our own worlds — look honestly — and we can see all of the above in abundance. Moreover, in chapter 5 we also see mention of Divine consequences — consequences that seem to be breaking out all around our worlds today.

Amos cites, metaphorically or perhaps in some instances unquenchable fires, waters of the seas poured out on the surface of the Earth, and destruction “flashed out” against what had seemed especially sturdy, even indestructible.

And communities of faith did not go un-criticized. Speaking for God, Amos scoffs at empty ritual and liturgical excesses without meaning — even “your festivals and ... your solemn assemblies,” and God asks to have our “noisy” songs and harp melodies removed from his hearing. Rather, Amos tells us that what God desires is that “justice (will) roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream” (a verse often cited by the late blessed Martin Luther King, Jr.).

In other words, what God is more interested in, we can see, is what Christians refer to as “doing the work of the Gospel”: loving and serving God and all of our neighbors, universally and unconditionally, and without hesitation attending to the ancient obligations of the righteous (sometimes referred to as “sacred acts of loving kindness”), in each case both literally and figuratively feeding hunger, quenching thirst, welcoming strangers, giving needed shelter (clothing and housing), taking care of the sick, and befriending (the lonely, the friendless, the imprisoned mentally or physically, and so on.)

Finally, in an epitaph-like conclusion at verses 25 to 27, Amos addresses the Northern Kingdom, and in so doing alludes, it seems, to God’s deliverance of Israel from enslavement in Egypt, followed by a 40-year opportunity to purify their worship, putting aside pagan idols and organizing themselves into a holy nation.

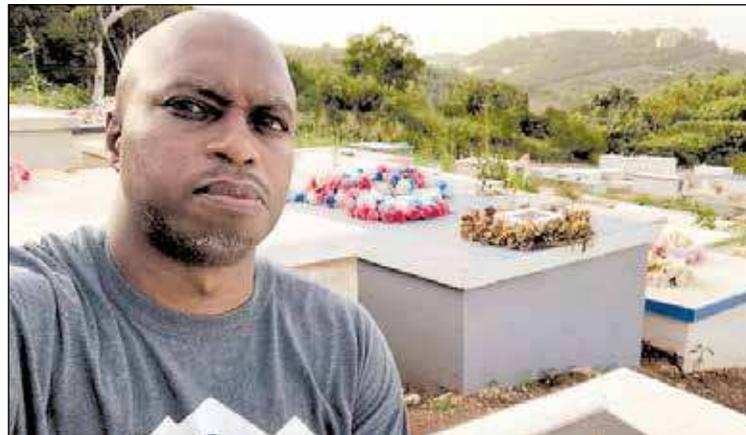
Since that work was far from completed, God then through the prophet Amos proclaimed — prophesied — that Israel would be taken into permanent exile in the far reaches of the Assyrian Empire (“beyond Damascus”), which indeed happened, beginning around 722 BCE.

The parallels (on the whole) with the circumstances of our emerging 21st century seem obvious. If only we would look, read, mark, learn, heed, and understand. Amen.

— *The Rev. Dr. Wesley S. Williams, Jr., K.St.J. is Washington National Cathedral Priest Scholar, Nave Chaplain and member of the Dean’s Council and Service Rotas. He formerly was Bishop’s Dean and Sub-Dean for the St. Thomas and St. John Deanery of the Episcopal Diocese of the Virgin Islands.*



Chris Schueler, left, Kitty Edwards, Education and Outreach coordinator with the Department of Planning and Natural Resources, Mike Jackson and Kerry North volunteer during a cleanup effort at Scott Beach on St. Thomas.



Mike Jackson visits the grave of his father, Maurice, the inspiration for his hurricane relief efforts.

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was affected and reminding them that my dad had died as a direct result of Maria, they were happy to include the V.I. I quickly volunteered to spearhead the effort, which will specifically focus on St. Thomas.”

To start up this initiative, he sought the help of Bishop Edward Gumbs, an old Navy buddy of Jackson’s father and the officiate at his funeral.

Bishop Gumbs coordinated with James Rollins, a representative of Episcopal Relief and Development, which provides relief assistance all over the world. Working with Episcopal Relief and Development, Bishop Gumbs and his staff at the Diocese of the Virgin Islands provide the Mountain Christian Church volunteers with housing and transportation during their stay.

After an assessment visit in early in the year, the first team was sent to St. Thomas for a week in March. Since then, small teams of 10 to 12 volunteers have been sent to St. Thomas nearly every month. Volunteers have worked primarily with My Brother’s Workshop and, on occasion, with All Hands and Hearts.

Projects have ranged from home renovations to yard cleanups to beach cleanup projects sponsored by the Department of Planning and Natural Resources.

All of the teams have volunteered on St. Thomas with the exception of the July team, which volunteered on St. Croix.

Jackson co-coordinates the overall effort from Maryland, but returned with the team scheduled for September.

“It was important for me to personally lead a mission trip during the week of September 20th to mark the anniversary of Maria’s battering of the island and Daddy’s subsequent passing on that day,” said Jackson. “Leading this churchwide initiative is my way of helping my hometown recover, rebuilding my island and honoring my father’s legacy and memory.”

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