

Opening Prayer

Lord, open our hearts and minds by the power of your Holy Spirit that, as the Scriptures are read and discussed, we may hear with joy what you say to us today. Amen.

Amos 8:1-12

^{8:1} This is what the Lord GOD showed me--a basket of summer fruit. ² He said, "Amos, what do you see?" And I said, "A basket of summer fruit." Then the LORD said to me, "The end has come upon my people Israel; I will never again pass them by. ³ The songs of the temple shall become wailings in that day," says the Lord GOD; "the dead bodies shall be many, cast out in every place. Be silent!" ⁴ Hear this, you that trample on the needy, and bring to ruin the poor of the land, ⁵ saying, "When will the new moon be over so that we may sell grain; and the sabbath, so that we may offer wheat for sale? We will make the ephah small and the shekel great, and practice deceit with false balances, ⁶ buying the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals, and selling the sweepings of the wheat." ⁷ The LORD has sworn by the pride of Jacob: Surely I will never forget any of their deeds. ⁸ Shall not the land tremble on this account, and everyone mourn who lives in it, and all of it rise like the Nile, and be tossed about and sink again, like the Nile of Egypt? ⁹ On that day, says the Lord GOD, I will make the sun go down at noon, and darken the earth in broad daylight. ¹⁰ I will turn your feasts into mourning, and all your songs into lamentation; I will bring sackcloth on all loins, and baldness on every head; I will make it like the mourning for an only son, and the end of it like a bitter day. ¹¹ The time is surely coming, says the Lord GOD, when I will send a famine on the land; not a famine of bread, or a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD. ¹² They shall wander from sea to sea, and from north to east; they shall run to and fro, seeking the word of the LORD, but they shall not find it.

Commentary

All the vision reports in Amos follow a similar pattern: First God shows Amos something; then Amos describes what he sees; next there is a dialogue between God and Amos; and finally, God explains what the vision means. In this case, the Hebrew words for "summer fruit" actually means "the time is ripe." Prophets often drove home a point with word play. Though puns are often associated with humor, in this instance, the word of God spoken by Amos is frighteningly final. The fruit is ripe, indicating that the end is near. Why would this terrible fate befall Israel? Greedy merchants had broken God's law, treating the poor as sources for profit rather than as neighbors and kin under the covenant. The merchants own words in v. 4-6 accuse them. They use different weights for buying and selling, and they tamper with standard units of

measurement. They even sell mixed grain with chaff and dirt. Their corrupt practices have driven people so far into debt that they have to sell themselves as slaves. What the merchants see as shrewd dealings Amos views as an irreversible rupture in their relationship with God.

Reflection

What groups today would correspond to the merchants in Amos' time? What would Amos say to them? What is the church's responsibility in relation to situations of injustice in our time?

Colossians 1:15-28

^{1:15} He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; ¹⁶ for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers--all things have been created through him and for him. ¹⁷ He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸ He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. ¹⁹ For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, ²⁰ and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross. ²¹ And you who were once estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, ²² he has now reconciled in his fleshly body through death, so as to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him-- ²³ provided that you continue securely established and steadfast in the faith, without shifting from the hope promised by the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven. I, Paul, became a servant of this gospel. ²⁴ I am now rejoicing in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am completing what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church. ²⁵ I became its servant according to God's commission that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, ²⁶ the mystery that has been hidden throughout the ages and generations but has now been revealed to his saints. ²⁷ To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. ²⁸ It is he whom we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone in all wisdom, so that we may present everyone mature in Christ.

Commentary

After giving thanks for the faith and love of the congregation at Colossae, the author of the letter breaks into song, an early hymn exalting the person and work of Jesus Christ. The hymn, probably familiar to the Colossians, helps establish a bond between the author and this congregation founded by someone else. The high regard and universal scope of the hymn is startling when compared with the career of the earthly Jesus, born as the son of a Galilean artisan. How did early Christians make the leap from the humble historic Jesus to the cosmic, eternal Christ? Colossians 1:27 provides a clue: "Christ in you." The powerful experience of the resurrected Christ within the church prompted several hymns: Philippians 2:6-11, 1 Timothy 3:16, Hebrews 1:3-4, and 1 Peter 2:22-25. The mystery of Christian faith is attested to not only

by exalted songs but also by the hardships willingly endured by Paul and his followers. Only by holding on to Christ could the Colossians mature in faith and feel accepted in God's presence.

Reflection

How does hymn-singing draw a congregation together? Which hymns do this best for you?

Luke 10:38-42

^{10:38} Now as they went on their way, he entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. ³⁹ She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying. ⁴⁰ But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me." ⁴¹ But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; ⁴² there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her."

Commentary

The Gospel writer depicts Martha as "distracted by her many tasks" and has Jesus chiding his hostess for her harried demeanor. This was a diagnosis of her soul's condition. The repetition of her name ("Martha, Martha") was a mild rebuke or impatient lament over her distraction from the things that really mattered. But at the same time Jesus was expressing deep love and concern for her, a closeness further revealed in the Gospel of John chapters 11 and 12. It requires a good friend to care enough to challenge our destructive behavior. In early Christian literature, "distracted" or "drawn away" referred to the cares of the world that pull us from God, like the thorns that choked the growth of the seed in the parable of the sower. Jesus ultimately presented Martha with the task of discernment. Sometimes the disciple sits and receives from Jesus. At other times, the disciple rises to serve. Luke underscores the disciples' need for trust and discernment by preceding the Mary and Martha story with the Good Samaritan parable, and then followed it with Jesus' teaching on prayer: "Give us this day our daily bread." This is the choice for all of us—to identify the "one thing needful"—everyday as we follow the Christ.

Reflection

When has a good friend helped you see something in your life that needed changing? How might you do this for a friend of your own?

- ^{52:1} Why do you boast, O mighty one,
of mischief done against the godly? All day long
- ² you are plotting destruction. Your tongue is like a sharp razor,
you worker of treachery.
- ³ **You love evil more than good,
and lying more than speaking the truth.**
- ⁴ You love all words that devour,
O deceitful tongue.
- ⁵ **But God will break you down forever;
he will snatch and tear you from your tent; he will uproot you from the
land of the living.**
- ⁶ The righteous will see, and fear,
and will laugh at the evildoer, saying,
- ⁷ **"See the one who would not take refuge in God,
but trusted in abundant riches, and sought refuge in wealth!"**
- ⁸ But I am like a green olive tree in the house of God.
I trust in the steadfast love of God forever and ever.
- ⁹ **I will thank you forever, because of what you have done.
In the presence of the faithful I will proclaim your name, for it is good.**

Closing Prayer

Grant, O Lord, that what we have said with our lips we may believe in our hearts, and that what we believe in our hearts we may practice in our lives, through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.