

Proper 11C  
Pentecost 8

July 18, 2010  
Legacy Sunday

Amos 8.1-12  
Ps 52  
Colossians 1.15-28  
Luke 10.38-42

We're getting a taste of the prophets this summer in a way we haven't lately. For me, it's the final year of the new lectionary cycle, so many of these Old Testament texts are new on Sundays. Last week and this week we hear from Amos who is thought to be the earliest prophet although it's impossible to date such things accurately. It seems generally agreed that he was the first of the prophets to prophesy that Israel would be sent into exile for the sins of the nation. Pretty strong rhetoric from Amos this morning. It makes it hard to say "Thanks be to God" sometimes, doesn't it?? ☺ The prophets spoke God's word of warning. Through Jonah, God gave Nineveh another chance; but not this time. It reminds me of an old joke; I may have told it before, so my apologies for repetition:

Two wild looking guys were standing on a road holding up a sign: "Turn Back! The end is near!" A fellow in a BMW convertible blasts past them, no doubt gesturing inappropriately and thinking they are a couple of religious nut cases. The next thing the two guys hear is a huge splash. One says to the other: "I guess our sign should say, 'Bridge out.'"

Amos is telling Judah in no uncertain terms that the bridge is out. If you want some feel-good religion, don't read the prophets. They hold our feet to the fire; individually and nationally. A seminary professor once asked with what theology is concerned. He received the expected responses: God, religion, spirituality. "No," he corrects, "theology is concerned with everything!" Amos isn't concerned with personal piety and devotional practices; he is concerned with the sins of society – trampling on the needy, bringing ruin to the poor, practicing deceit by thinning the ephah of wheat with some dust and making the scales weigh in our favor. If we think that was Judah's problem and not ours, we'd better think again about how we spend our money, our buying and business practices, how we welcome the stranger and care for the environment.

Amos then describes the terrible consequences of Israel's sin: mourning, lamentation, darkness at noon and even the land will tremble. But the part which seems the most terrifying is the famine and thirst for the words of the Lord. "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." God's very words will dry up. A loss of something more important than bread or water.

I wonder if Mary somehow knew that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem and the cross and that she was about to lose something more important than bread or water. And that's why she was at his feet.

The Rev. Dr. Tom Long writes that Luke's story about the visit of Jesus to the home of Mary and Martha is almost guaranteed to stir up an argument. They are so often used as types or symbols of ways to interact in the world that we can miss hearing their own story. Through the centuries, Mary and Martha have stood for a wide array of contrasting styles: service versus worship; monastic vs. secular life; social activism vs. personal piety, faith vs. works, traditional vs. enlightened feminine roles, and the list can go on.

But the fact that this story of Mary and Martha follows immediately after last Sunday's gospel of the good (or merciful) Samaritan should not go unnoticed. A lawyer posed a question to Jesus about eternal life. What does it take to acquire it? When Jesus challenges him to recall the law, the lawyer answers, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself."

The story of the Good Samaritan, Joy Strome writes, becomes the illustration of how one loves one's neighbor. The story of Martha and Mary becomes the illustration of how one loves God. Luke is working to define discipleship and these two stories begin to show the way. The Samaritan loves his neighbor by what he did for the man beaten by robbers and Mary loves Jesus. Simple, right?

Jesus' injunction to the lawyer was *Go and do likewise*. Now Jesus affirms and blesses not going and doing but sitting still and listening. Side by side, Luke has placed these two stories of the call for active engagement in the world by addressing injustice with mercy, and the human need for being still, listening for the word of God, and learning from Jesus.

In Christian life we cannot neatly separate the two; it's not as cleanly defined as doing the dishes or learning from the Lord. Not over here is love of neighbor and here is love of God. They are intertwined; mixed together so you can hardly tell where one ends and the other begins. We show our love of God by loving our neighbor and the love of neighbor grows out of our love of God. Both the Samaritan and Mary are examples to be emulated.

The hard part for us is discerning when to do one and when to do the other. There is nothing wrong with Martha fixing the meal and cleaning up afterwards. Mary probably did her share of meals as well. That's hospitality and the Bible is filled with examples. It's how we show love and welcome and caring. In fact, it may be essential to show love to neighbor and God BY baking the bread and putting out the tablecloth and pouring the wine as well as cleaning the bathroom and emptying the garbage.

We run into trouble when we find ourselves separating busyness and service from the life-giving word of the Gospel. Mary wasn't sitting at the feet of a shoe salesman while Martha labored in the kitchen. She was sitting at the feet of the Savior. The shoe salesman could have waited and Mary could have helped her sister with the dishes. But it was Jesus in the house and Luke has made it abundantly clear over the past weeks that there is urgency in Jesus' mission. He has turned his face to Jerusalem, sent out the disciples two by two with no bags and instructions not to linger if the gospel is not being received; keep moving, don't stop to bury the dead or put a hand to the plow. There's not much time left.

What if, as in Amos' prophecy, the word is taken from us? What if we desperately run to and fro and cannot hear God's word? The time is now and Mary knows it. It may be that Martha's mistake was thinking that she could invite Jesus into her home and her life and then keep about her business as usual; doing the tasks which society had allotted her. But when Jesus is invited in, when he becomes a part of your life, sooner or later you'll have to recognize that all of life is going to be different. Jesus doesn't fit neatly into the world we have constructed with all its distractions and demands. Everything in the household is going to change because Jesus has been invited. We all need to sit at the feet of the Savior and hear the word of the Lord.

This church is a place we come to hear and respond to the word of God. Not just on Sundays, but in worship throughout the week and the countless ways our spiritual lives and relationship with God through Jesus are deepened in community with each other. It would be pretty presumptuous to think that St. Andrew's and St. Swithin's are necessary to hear and share the gospel, but this church community has become central to our lives together and the way we experience the presence of the most Holy One.

We know that last week was Ice Cream Sundae Sunday and today is Legacy Sunday. Today we recognize and thank those who have made a commitment to the continuation of hearing the Word of God in this place for generations to come. St. Andrew's and St. Swithin's have been entrusted to us by past generations who knew the importance of this place for worship and community and that here we could hear Amos' prophecy and respond to it in ways that conform our lives and our community to Christ's image. The responses on the newsprint sheets out in the narthex are clear: the fellowship, community, worship, love, and service that begin here has changed our lives. This is holy ground and we know it.

If the word of the Lord is not to dry up in this place, if we intend to pass St. Andrew's and St. Swithin's on to our children and our children's children, it's up to us. Today we will thank those who have made a provision for the future of this church as founding members of St. Andrew's Legacy Society.

And I have a humble confession to make. Busyness and distractions have taken over and our intention to have our wills updated and our estate plans finalized didn't happen as Doug and I had hoped by the deadline of today, July 18, to be a founding member. But I am taking Ralph [Angulo] (and Carl Knirk) at their word, that the intention of doing so is good enough, and so here is our card and we will make good on it. The decision to remember St. Andrew's beyond our own lives has been made. I encourage you to do the same in whatever means is right for you; small or large – every gift matters. These cards will be at coffee hour, so if you're like me and got trapped by inertia, we'll be forgiven. And if you don't fill out a card today, the Legacy Society is not closed! Sustaining members will be added over the long life of the church.

This is a place we are fed by Jesus – at this table and the picnic and coffee hour; a place we hear the word of God – in worship, prayer and song, bible studies, education for young and old; a place we can approach the divine mystery and see the face of God in one another; where we are sent out to address the social injustices of which Amos speaks. Here is a place we are strengthened for the service of Martha, the contemplation and learning of Mary, and the mercy of the Samaritan; where we can choose the better part, which will not be taken away from us: a place at the feet of Jesus.

Gail Wheatley+