

Scripture Readings and Sermon

July 21, 2019 by Rev. Mark Brechin

Commentary on Amos 8:1-12 (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

Following the vision of the plumb line, the Lord gives Amos another vision of summer fruit with the promise to once again "never pass them by". While the plumb line focuses on God's justice being equally applied to all quite literally creating a level playing field, the summer fruit explains why God's justice can no longer be avoided. The use of the Hebrew word for "summer fruit" is used because a slight variation of the word means "end" which signals the end of the season for the kingdom of Israel. This end is brought about by the greed of Israel. The references to the ephah and the shekel point to the practices of buying grain from the farmers with scales that reduced the cost and then selling the same grain for sacrifices with scales that inflated the price. In fact, the entire process had become so commercialized that they could hardly wait for the "new moon" and the "sabbath" to end so that they could get back to business. Once again the Lord heard the cry of the needy but, instead of Pharaoh and Egypt, it was the people's own leaders in Israel. This will be God's final ruling or "word" on the matter. Once judgment has been past, God will no longer speak words of warning or correction to the people and there will be a prophetic famine.

Commentary on Colossians 1:15-28 (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

This section is packed with abstract theological concepts. While some scholars argue that this was actually a common early hymn of the church (15-20), it does serve to challenge the growing Gnosticism in the church of the Colossians. Various heresies at the time viewed Jesus on par with angels and the indwelling of God as simply an awakening of the divine nature inherent in humanity. Addressing these misconceptions, the "hymn" can be broken into three primary points: 1) Incarnation, 2) Ascension, 3) and Trinity. In 15-16, the incarnational nature of Jesus is described. Jesus is not "firstborn" in the sense that Jesus is separate from God but rather Jesus is the expression of God's nature in created form much like light is the expression of the sun in the visible realm. The beauty of creation is a manifestation of the beauty of Jesus. In 17-18 just as Jesus is in all of creation through the incarnation, all of creation is brought into God through Jesus in the ascension. This takes on a special nature as the church which exists within the body of Christ. As the mediator between the divinity of God and God's creation, Jesus is both God with us and us with God. This however does not reduce the divine nature of Jesus but rather our perspective of that nature. In 19-20, this full divinity is affirmed in the Trinity which addresses both the fullness of God and the mediation between heaven and earth through the cross. Despite Jesus' once for all suffering that established mediation between heaven and earth, Paul is quick to point out that humanities refusal to accept this mediation leads to continual suffering. "What is lacking in Christ's affliction" is not due to lack of righteousness but the unwillingness of humanity to let go of sin. Instead of accepting this beautiful mystery of salvation in Christ, people choose to make the messengers suffer.

Commentary on Luke 10:38-42 (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

There are only three places in the Bible where Martha is mentioned: 1) the raising of Lazarus (John 11:1-19); 2) the anointing of Jesus (John 12:2); and 3) this story of Mary and Martha. While the stories of Jesus' anointing and this story seem very similar with Martha serving and Mary at Jesus' feet, Lazarus is missing from Luke's version. In fact, Luke is the only other Gospel besides John in 11-12 to mention the name Lazarus but it is in connection to the story of the rich and the poor men who died (Luke 16:20-25). While in John Lazarus appears to be the owner of the house (12:1), Luke states that Martha welcomed Jesus "into her home". In contrast to the story of the Good Samaritan in the previous section of Luke where the priest and the Levite walked on the "far" side of the road, Mary is seated

beside or up against Jesus' feet. The Greek words used both indicate extreme locations. While those who are in leadership are as far away as possible from the person in need, Mary is as close as she can possibly get to Jesus. The reference to "feet" also indicates a special intimacy. Whether it was this level of intimacy or the amount of work that needed to be done which prompted Martha's question to Jesus is of some debate. Jesus' response, however, is not about Mary but about the state of Martha's spiritual life. It is not enough to welcome Jesus into your life. Jesus wants to be the center of your attention.

Sermon Summary (*Youtube [Sermon Video](#)*)

After the story of the lawyer who was told to "Go and Do", Luke moves on to a story where Martha is told to stop all of her doing. Mary in this story is often viewed as the prime example of contemplation but is Jesus really promoting contemplation over activity? Martha is often viewed as being obsessed with doing the work of the hostess but could there be another reason Martha wants Mary to join her? By finding new ways to look at familiar stories, we begin to find hidden depths in scripture that we may not have considered before.

In the story, Luke describes Mary as being at Jesus' feet. The words used to describe Mary's proximity and location both indicate a high degree of intimacy. The reference to feet in scripture is often in the context of intimacy (see Boaz and Ruth in Ruth 3:7). Even today in the Middle East it is considered very rude to show someone the soles of your feet. While Martha could probably have used some help preparing, serving, and cleaning up, it might also be the case that Martha was concerned about what people might think if they saw where and how close Mary was sitting. This may have been what Jesus meant when he said that she was "worried" by many things.

If it was not just Martha's activity that Jesus was critiquing but also her concern over social norms, then the one thing needed which Mary was doing has less to do with her inactivity and more to do with the direction of her focus. Mary was totally focused on hearing the Word of God. It was not that what Martha was doing was bad but that her first priority should have been God. This is why Jesus told the lawyer to "Go and Do". If the greatest commandment including loving one's neighbor, then the lawyer should go and love his neighbor. The question is not about activity or inactivity but rather about our priorities.

Amos told the Israelites that their priorities had shifted from worshiping God to the business of worship which included the buying and selling of sacrifices. Instead of worshiping God by caring for God's chosen children, they were ignoring the cries of the needy and making their condition worse. God could no longer let this situation continue. It was time for the people to reap the suffering they had sown. It was time for the harvest of summer fruit. Because of their focus on themselves rather than God, they would no longer be able to hear the Word of God even when it was being read. This was the warning that Jesus was giving to Martha. If she kept making God a lesser priority, there would come a day when she would no longer have ears to hear the words of grace being offered.

These words of grace are offered to each of us through Jesus who is God incarnate, first born of the dead, and the fullness of God in creation. Through the Holy Spirit, the Word will dwell in us if we have the faith to make God a priority in our lives. This is the mystery of Christ in us. If we learn to not only go to worship but to worship God with all of our heart, mind, and soul, we will be like Mary and find the one thing needed - Jesus. It is simply a matter of priorities.