

Sermon

Giving Jesus Some Prime Time

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Bacon Memorial Presbyterian Church

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In our old testament scripture today, we again encounter the prophet Amos who is giving a very stern warning to the people of Israel - one of five visions that he provides to the Israelites about what their lifestyle and what their culture will lead to. Let me remind you of some of that scripture:

“We will buy the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals and selling the sweepings of the wheat. The time is surely come 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. “

The Opening line of Amos’s scripture today says “this is what the Lord God showed me – a basket of summer fruit“. A bowl of *summer* fruit specifically. The Lord then says I will pass by my people. I’ve had it with how they live and how they’ve turned away from me.

When you have a bowl of Summer fruit one thing is certain. It looks beautiful and inviting when you put the fruit in the bowl but just a few days later the fruit starts to become overly ripe and it is no longer edible. And it got me wondering. Has our bowl of summer fruit become overly ripened because we’ve neglected to enjoy it. Has God given us through his creation, through our beautiful planet and the gifts that we have within our

own lives within our church within this ministry have we overlooked all these amazing Blessings, our own bowl of ripened fruit?

As I scoured back 100 years preparing for our anniversary celebration, I often hear stories about 10 years ago 20 years ago 30 years ago there were so many people in attendance there wasn't room for everyone to sit. Multiple classes of Sunday school, youth groups, and membership in the roles of like three or 400 people – even 1200 people at one point. Was that our summer fruit and has that fruit lost its color?

Some of the changes within this church are a reflection of the immediate community. The population of Niagara Falls has declined about 50% since 1960 mostly due to manufacturing leaving. Jobs leave people leave. But I believe its our cancel culture and distractions that have led to this today.

Today's world genuinely reflects this scripture. People are not seeking the word of God. The warning within Amos's words "they shall wander from sea to sea from north to east, they shall run to and fro seeking the word of the Lord, but they shall not find it". Do you see people running to and fro? I do.

God's words in this scripture from Amos are a warning. You never really miss something until you don't have it anymore and we sometimes think its always going to be this way. If you were here and alive in this church in the seventies for example, would have imagined the world would change so much that we would look like we do and so many other churches look today? It was easy to be a Christian when our community all went to church. It's much harder now because people are not finding God because

they're not looking for God. They're following false gods all over the place. Money, power, obsession with self. Keeping people down so they can stay up. Even today as our economy whirls out of control who is really getting stamped down by that – the needy, the poor, the marginalized. They are the ones who take the hit the hardest the longest. Amos is an agitator. He's trying to tell the people of Israel what their behavior is going to lead to and that God is going to destroy the way they live. How do you tell a false God from a real God? False gods won't tell you something that will make you angry. False gods won't tell you to change your ways. False gods won't tell you that you have to sacrifice for others.

So what about us? Are you Mary or are you Martha. I'm gonna be honest and tell you right now I'm Martha. And by the way don't worry about the gender of the story it's a patriarchal influence that has nothing to do with the story so don't get weighed down by that. Are you distracted exhausted by your tasks of every day life? When you finally get to your prayers or get to church or get to your Bible you're wiped out. Now this is not being distracted by frivolous things these are things we have to do. Clean the house, grocery shop, cook, go to work, clean the bathroom,,,. But in a little passage here from Luke one that's probably the most famous passage of any in the Bible... Jesus surprises Martha. Martha is upset. I've been in her shoes. I'm doing all the work having people over for a party or dinner whatever, and I'm not getting help I need so that I could sit down with my guests and enjoy their conversation. So I know where she's coming from and she expects Jesus to say you know you're right Martha-- Mary help out your sister and maybe then there'll be time for both of you to sit down. But he surprises us doesn't he he says no Martha - let the task wait. My

teaching, my word is most important. You can't do the "thing" till you put my word first. "They shall run to and fro seeking the word of the Lord but they shall not find it." Are you tired? Are you putting other things ahead of your worship time? And then you find yourself by Wednesday a bit anxious, not focused, upset, depressed - don't be surprised. Treat worship, treat your prayer time, your Bible time as important as you treat your doctors appointments, a wedding invitation, our hundredth anniversary dinner. When somebody asks if you can come to someone's baseball game but it interrupts Sunday worship you say I'm so sorry I can't come. And that's really hard to do. We're going to let somebody down. Maybe even a child. But isn't that better than letting down ourselves and our faith?

So can you be Mary? Amos's words have a lot to say about what's going on in our world, in our community and in our church today. And I'm very encouraged by our attendance and I'm very encouraged about the level of participation that I see and I feel from our members. But I wonder what does our bowl of fruit look like today? I'm not going to define that I'm gonna let you do that. But in my mind I think it's time for all of us including myself to give Jesus some of our prime time.

Amen