

Sermon July 17, 2016

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This week we have Amos talking about bowls of summer fruit, Paul talking about Christ as the head of the Church and Jesus telling Martha that Mary can shirk her duties.

I sympathize with Martha. Yesterday I hosted the second annual mass birthday party. We did birthdays for my wife, my wife's son, his wife and three kids. Luckily all were fed, celebrated and survived. But what was Amos saying; he isn't saying nice things to the people of Israel. Last week he said the priest, his family and the king would die by the sword, the priest's wife would be a prostitute and Israel would go into exile. This week he's talking about summer fruit. What is this summer fruit stuff anyway? One commentary I read suggests it's better translated as over ripe fruit and there's some word play here where the Hebrew for the word "summer" is the same as the phrase "the end" except for one small accent mark. (I love the internet; I don't know all this stuff.)

What the Lord is telling Amos is that Israel is like a bowl of rotten fruit, the kind where the flies are buzzing around. I like the flies, when we're shopping I tell my wife that if the flies don't want the fruit we probably won't either but in this case it's gone too far and it's only good for throwing out. The merchants have their thumbs on the scale, probably a big dent in the grain measure and they're selling the floor sweepings. It's time to clean house, the dead will be many, the songs will be lamentations, they will wear sackcloth and a famine will be on the land. This is not a good time.

Meanwhile Jesus is telling Martha not to get on Mary's case, Mary needs to do what she's doing. Does this mean he doesn't value what Martha is doing? Probably not, hospitality to travelers was an important thing in these times and it was the woman's job to see to it this was done right. Even today when people call you don't send them out to the kitchen and tell them to fend for themselves but it sounds like Martha is running on over load, maybe even trying to do more than she needs to. She even throws out hospitality by suggesting Jesus doesn't care about her and asking him to dress down her sister in front of everyone else. Jesus's response is to try to cool things down. He maybe also recognizes that there needs to be a balance in life where people sometimes need to sit up and take notice of what's happening around them. This could be what Mary's doing.

We ourselves are at a point where we need to sit up and take notice of what's happening. The African American community is upset and rightly so that they are not respected in this country especially by those in authority. The level of trust is low. Making it worse is that they can't even trust those in the community that they live in. The response to this lack of trust it seems is to buy a gun. If you want to protect yourself and those you love you must have the means to do it. This is what society is saying but the reality is the more guns we have, the more people get shot. Feeding this lack of trust has been the recent videos, cell phone and other wise showing unnecessary police shootings. Shootings of unarmed people, mentally ill people, shootings indicating the shooter is driven by rage, all leading to the most recent high profile shootings of Alton Sterling and Philando Castile. I can't comment if the shooting of Alton Sterling was justified. He has been known to actively resisted arrest, carry a gun and to use drugs and apparently he did have a gun on him at the time he was shot. Philando Castile though was apparently doing everything right to comply with the officer. He had stopped, told the officer he had a weapon and a registration. The officer then told him to show him his driver's license and the registration but when he started to reach for his billfold he was told to stop and then was shot.

In each of these cases I can see police officers that may rightfully fear for their lives, again a lack of trust. This doesn't mean either of these officers is right or justified but with the number of guns on the streets I can understand their fear. The protests that resulted were good and justified. This is our constitutionally protected right and the way to show the size of public indignation in what has happened. Unfortunately it seems too many times that these protests do not achieve any results, resulting in frustration that nothing will ever change, again, a lack of trust and so you get shootings like we had in Dallas.

How many places is this lack of trust showing itself? The whites don't trust African Americans and Hispanics and the feeling is returned, Christians don't trust the Jews and neither of them trust Muslims, residents don't trust immigrants and people that don't speak your language. Where does it end?

Fortunately most people are good, friendly, trustworthy people and there is no need for this distrust but it is growing like an infection and in turn fueling a neighborhood arms race. This is not to say there are not significant issues creating mistrust like an infection and the only way to get to the root of this infection is to face them, but we also need to be aware of how this infection spreads. When this is all you hear on the news, when this is what your friend and neighbors are talking about it's hard to ignore. I know I'm preaching to the choir here at St. Giles' (I know there's a choir here somewhere). This congregation has been open to, tolerant of and trusting of many people but as a congregation and individually we need to recognize this infection where ever we see it. Seek to understand if there is some injustice at work or if what we are seeing is simply mistrust and fear, then take appropriate action. Feeding people here at St. Giles' helps to build trust one on one, The Hunger Resource Network and things like the Cross Walk help to build trust on a larger scale.

Both the injustice and the fear and mistrust we see are the kinds of evils in our world that Amos railed against but there is hope. As Paul brings out in Colossians, "you who were once estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his fleshly body through death, so as to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him". This he says will happen as long as we "continue securely established and steadfast in the faith, without shifting from the hope promised by the gospel". As long as we cling to and spread the Good News as proclaimed by Jesus Christ we can defeat fear and prejudice and build the trust that will help to knit our society together.

I leave you with a verse from a song in Rogers & Hammerstein's The King and I:

Is a danger to be trusting one another  
One will seldom want to do what other wishes  
But unless someday somebody trust somebody  
There'll be nothing left on earth excepting fishes.

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