

***Journeying through the Revised Common Lectionary***  
Readings, Commentary, and Questions for Discussion for July 21, 2019  
Sixth Sunday after Pentecost, Proper 11



**THE READINGS**

**First Reading: Amos 8:1-12** *Alternate: Genesis 18:1-10a*

<sup>1</sup> This is what the Lord GOD showed me – a basket of summer fruit. <sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> 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!”

<sup>4</sup> Hear this, you that trample on the needy,  
and bring to ruin the poor of the land,

<sup>5</sup> 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,

<sup>6</sup> buying the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals,  
and selling the sweepings of the wheat.”

<sup>7</sup> The LORD has sworn by the pride of Jacob:

Surely I will never forget any of their deeds.

<sup>8</sup> 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?

<sup>9</sup> On that day, says the Lord GOD,

I will make the sun go down at noon,

and darken the earth in broad daylight.  
<sup>10</sup> 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.  
<sup>11</sup> 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.  
<sup>12</sup> 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.

*Worth Noting: Amos spoke in the mid-8<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E., a prosperous time in the kingdom of Israel under the forty-year reign of Jeroboam, and a generation before the Assyrians conquered Israel and dispersed the people around their empire. In his ministry, Amos claimed the LORD cares enough about issues of justice to destroy those who exploit others, slave or free. Are issues around labor practices (hours worked, minimum wage laws, and so forth) matters of concern for your religious traditions or are they “politics” and not to be meddled with by a religious community?*

**Psalm 52** *Alternate Psalm 15*

<sup>1</sup> Why do you boast, O mighty one,  
of mischief done against the godly?  
All day long <sup>2</sup> you are plotting destruction.  
Your tongue is like a sharp razor, you worker of treachery.  
<sup>3</sup> You love evil more than good,  
and lying more than speaking the truth.  
<sup>4</sup> You love all words that devour,  
O deceitful tongue.  
<sup>5</sup> 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.  
<sup>6</sup> The righteous will see, and fear,  
and will laugh at the evildoer, saying,  
<sup>7</sup> “See the one who would not take refuge in God,  
but trusted in abundant riches,  
and sought refuge in wealth!”  
<sup>8</sup> But I am like a green olive tree in the house of God.  
I trust in the steadfast love of God forever and ever.

<sup>9</sup> 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.

*Worth Noting: This has been categorized as a Psalm of the Poor, contrasting the recklessness and boasting of the strong-man with the steadfast faithfulness of the poor. While Amos predicted the destruction of the unjust wealthy in Israel, the psalmist foresees both the destruction of the strongman and the fruitfulness of the poor. Verse 6a might be understood as “the righteous will see, and stand in awe:” not fear as in dread or terror.*

## **Second Reading: Colossians 1:15-28**

<sup>15</sup> He is the image of the invisible God,  
the firstborn of all creation;  
<sup>16</sup> 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.  
<sup>17</sup> He himself is before all things,  
and in him all things hold together.  
<sup>18</sup> 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.  
<sup>19</sup> For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell,  
<sup>20</sup> 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.

<sup>21</sup> And you who were once estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, <sup>22</sup> he has now reconciled in his fleshly body through death, so as to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him – <sup>23</sup> 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. <sup>24</sup> 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. <sup>25</sup> I became its servant according to God's commission that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, <sup>26</sup> the mystery that has been hidden throughout the ages and generations but has now been revealed to his saints. <sup>27</sup> 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. <sup>28</sup> It is he whom we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone in all wisdom, so that we may present everyone mature in Christ.

*Worth Noting: Verses 15 to 20 are believed to be a quotation from a hymn the Colossians already knew that celebrates the dominion of Christ in the universe. Then Paul speaks of the “mystery, which is Christ in you. . .” (Colossians 1:27). Is that a good summary of the Christian mystery, that the*

*creator and lord of the universe is present within each Christian?*

**Gospel: Luke 10:38-42**

<sup>38</sup> Now as they went on their way, he [Jesus] entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. <sup>39</sup> She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying. <sup>40</sup> 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."

<sup>41</sup> But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; <sup>42</sup> there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her."

*Worth Noting: Multitaskers (which is to say, most of us) secretly dislike this story. We think Martha gets a bad rap for arranging hospitality and we all know that's a really good thing. That's why Jesus and his disciples stopped there, right? Take a poll among your friends: How many support Martha and how many Mary?*

**CONNECTING WITH THE SCRIPTURES**

**Entering into the Scriptures**

If ever one wanted proof that the Bible is not of human origin, its emphasis throughout on the exalted place of the poor in the City of God could be definitive. In contrast to the readings from Amos and Psalm 52, were I to compose a set of texts they would celebrate the rich, speak of a god that showers wealth on his (and my god would be a "he") most devoted followers. My scripture would honor the bright, the good-looking, the well-spoken, the charismatic, the athletic. It would emphasize the glorious past and triumphant future of my country. That would be my bible.

The Scriptures we have speak of a God who chose a nation of slaves to share his covenant. God chose not the honored first-born son but the second or eleventh, the "runt of the litter," to carry on the project. God's prophets demand "justice" for the poor, the widowed, and the refugees. And by "justice" they mean a share of the goods of the earth sufficient to live as a human, regardless of their ability to compete successfully.

Indeed, this Bible opens with two clear accounts of God's instructions to humans to care for creation as God's stewards, called to act for the benefit of all creation. This Bible tells of a God who asks his followers not to conquer other nations but to reconcile with them: to be as close to them as a child in her mother's womb.

Like any mother, this God is only as happy as her saddest children. Hence the poor, the bereaved widows, the struggling refugees, the dismayed orphans: These God empathizes with and demands they be treated justly. This God has a womb and weeps when her children weep. Angry she can be when her children are in danger

We know not how, but this God is as close to us as our breath.

**Hospitality, Horticulture, and Hosting the Messiah**

Why does Jesus, who models compassion and understanding, go off on Martha as he does? Can't he understand how frustrating it must be for Martha to do all the hard labor

while Mary sits around enjoying Jesus' company? As we commented in "Worth Noting" above, Jesus probably chose to avail himself of the hospitality of the sisters because of Martha's good cooking.

Well, maybe Martha deserves to be chided for being "distracted" (Luke 10:40-41), but not because she was distracted by cooking, but because she was distracted by Jesus teaching in her living quarters. Preparing a meal for company is, after all, a sacred endeavor. A Rabbinic maxim gets my point: "Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai taught: 'If you have a sapling in your hand, and someone says to you that the Messiah has come, stay and finish the planting, and then go to greet the Messiah'" (Avot d'Rabbi Natan 31b).

Consider the image of Jesus as a carpenter. While working the wood, did he not concentrate on being the best carpenter ever? Don't we imagine he was immersed in the work before him? Those following Jesus through the Rule of Benedict divide their days equally among work, prayer, and rest. They live in a way that honors all three of those times, and none over another.

The wholly holy life means living intentionally, mindfully, in the present, in the eternal presence and womb of the living God. Whenever we do, the surrounding world disappears; time flies, and time stands still. It may be a time of prayer or work or play. Nothing can distract us: even the Messiah sitting in the next room.

### Questions to Prompt Conversation

Colossians 1:15-20, a hymn well known to the audience, exalts Jesus as a divine redeemer and ruler of the universe. Think of your favorite hymn. How is God or Jesus described? Try the same thing for a hymn your community sings regularly. Who is the God of the song?

Now it's time for you to describe the god you would like to have – ten new commandments and all. Be honest: What would your god look like and do? How would your god interact with the world? Whom would your god support? Might that be why the God of the Bible is so hard to understand and to follow?

Do you see your everyday life as holy? Where are the holes in it?



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*Unless expressly stated otherwise, all quotations from Scripture are taken from the New Revised Standard Version, © 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A.*

*"Christ in the House of Martha and Mary" by Diego Velazquez (1618) via Wikimedia.*

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