

Advent Devotional December 8, 2021

Scripture

Amos 8:1-14

This is what the Sovereign Lord showed me: a basket of ripe fruit. "What do you see, Amos?" he asked.

"A basket of ripe fruit," I answered.

Then the Lord said to me, "The time is ripe for my people Israel; I will spare them no longer.

"In that day," declares the Sovereign Lord, "the songs in the temple will turn to wailing. Many, many bodies—flung everywhere! Silence!"

*Hear this, you who trample the needy
and do away with the poor of the land,*

saying,

*"When will the New Moon be over
that we may sell grain,
and the Sabbath be ended
that we may market wheat?"—
skimping on the measure,
boosting the price
and cheating with dishonest scales,
buying the poor with silver
and the needy for a pair of sandals,
selling even the sweepings with the wheat.*

The Lord has sworn by himself, the Pride of Jacob: "I will never forget anything they have done.

*"Will not the land tremble for this,
and all who live in it mourn?
The whole land will rise like the Nile;
it will be stirred up and then sink
like the river of Egypt.*

"In that day," declares the Sovereign Lord,

*"I will make the sun go down at noon
and darken the earth in broad daylight.
I will turn your religious festivals into mourning
and all your singing into weeping.
I will make all of you wear sackcloth
and shave your heads.
I will make that time like mourning for an only son
and the end of it like a bitter day.*

*"The days are coming," declares the Sovereign Lord,
"when I will send a famine through the land—
not a famine of food or a thirst for water,
but a famine of hearing the words of the Lord.
People will stagger from sea to sea
and wander from north to east,*

*searching for the word of the Lord,
but they will not find it.*

“In that day

*“the lovely young women and strong young men
will faint because of thirst.*

*Those who swear by the sin of Samaria—
who say, ‘As surely as your god lives, Dan,’
or, ‘As surely as the god of Beersheba lives’—
they will fall, never to rise again.”*

Devotional

Jon Mathieu '21

Bodies—flung everywhere.

This is the prophet’s imagery of anger and judgment. It would be natural, and perhaps necessary, for us to question this imagery. To feel uncomfortable with a prophetic word of punishment that takes shape as physical violence.

But Advent invites us to pause and ask all our questions. We not only look back to prophets like Amos, but we look ahead (from their vantage point) to the promised one, Jesus. So let’s ask some questions.

Why is God so angry in this discourse? In a word: oppression. Needy and poor people are being trampled by the rich. What little they have is being taken away from them by the merchants’ corrupt and greedy business practices. We are invited to examine our own practices toward those who are barely able to survive.

At whom is God angry? Specifically the corrupt and oppressive ruling class within “my people Israel.” This is not an us-versus-them moment where some other nation or religion is being vilified. We are invited to consider how our families, our churches, our governments are treating the most vulnerable.

How will God answer this grave injustice? It turns out not to be violence against bodies so much as spiritual devastation. Religious festivals will turn to mourning. Shaved heads and sackcloth will mark a time of famine—but it will be the absence of God’s revelation, not a famine of food or water. We are invited to acknowledge the pain of God’s absence in our own lives.

And yet Advent points us to something, or someone, beyond the famine. It will not be violence that topples injustice or lifts up the poor. As Mary would sing centuries later, God will scatter the proud and bring down the mighty from their thrones through a baby’s humble birth.

Prayer

God, we must repent. Help us to see the ways we oppress people and peoples. If we must shave our heads or put on sackcloth, teach us the humility and give us the strength. And yet we look for the same hope as the most poor and vulnerable among us—that you are near to us and will lift us up.