

## Sermon: Fruitful Busy-ness

Year C, Proper 11

[Amos 8:1-12; Psalm 52; Genesis 18:1-10a; Psalm 15; Colossians 1:15-28; Luke 10:38-42](#)

Offered July 21, 2019 to Brookline Community Church, Brookline, NH

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Before I have Linda read the passage from Luke, let's review last week's service: at the Lake, Hollis joined us, we had a commissioning & a blessing of prayer shawls, Rev. Tanya preached about on the Good Samaritan and the beginning of the letter to the Colossians and Kier & Cora were baptized. On the day before, I had told the Whitcombs that we could certainly do as they asked and have the funeral on Thursday even though I had no idea if anyone but me could be there. So, after the service I was checking with people that they could help me welcome the community to the funeral. And making sure everyone had felt welcomed at the Lake. And, let's be honest, trying some of those homemade donuts which were pretty awesome.

In my running around, I breezed by Jill and Kevin and Carol and Jocelyn and Jill said, "I wish I had my camera." When I turned to see where she was looking, I saw Yifan and K.J. sitting on a picnic table together, looking out over the Lake. Just sitting. In this beautiful place on this beautiful day. Hanging out and being brothers in Christ.

Yifan and K.J. were right. It was a place to be and not run around and do. Jill was right, we need to recognize those moments when stopping is the right thing to do. I had three prophets speaking to me; Yifan as he sat with a little boy on the shore of a lake reminding me to step into this moment and get out of an event four days in the future. Jill for getting me to slow down and notice the moment. And K.J. for taking that moment on the shore of the Sea of Potanipo and enjoying the breeze off the Lake and the love of the people who surrounded him.

Linda, would you read Luke 10:38-42?

[Linda reads.]

Mary and Martha. One of my favorite passages. I am so clearly on Team Martha. I think the easy message is stop fussing in the kitchen, woman, and sit down and listen. But the message of the Good Samaritan is stop listening to your inner dialogue of *what will people think* and get doing, get on with loving your neighbor. So maybe the Mary and Martha message is not an "either/or" and more of a "both/and."

So I'm going to ask you to hold that idea of a "both/and" for a minute.

In the reading from Amos that Linda is about to read, God is going to hold up a basket of summer fruit to Amos and ask him what he sees. It's a symbol, which means, yes, of course it's a basket of summer fruit. In our case, it's a basket of locally grown peaches. But if it's also a symbol, we need to think about what that basket of fruit brings to mind, makes us feel. I can point to the flag and ask you what you see, and you can say a flag, but you can also say, "the United States" or "an Olympic athlete" or "the antique fire trucks in the July 4<sup>th</sup> parade". I look at the flag and I see my dad's service in Vietnam.

So here is a basket of summer fruit. What do you see in this basket of New Hampshire peaches?

[Congregation shares what they see]

Hold onto those images. Linda, would you read Amos 8:1-12?

[Linda reads.]

Thank you, Linda. Surprisingly enough, none of you looked at this basket of peaches and said, “*the dead bodies shall be many, cast out in every place.*” (Amos 8:3) So how did Amos come up with that? This is part of what God called him to say, so in part it’s just God speaking. Plus there’s a bit of word play here. The Hebrew word for “summer fruit” is put up against a word that means the end of time. It doesn’t really work in English, but you can think of it as “summer fruit” “summary justice.”<sup>1</sup> The word play is intentional, but how we move from peaches to God no longer speaking to, caring about or caring for God’s chosen people is prophecy. Amos does that work for us.

Prophets see under the present, they name what the people are numb to, what is causing them grief. They articulate the yearnings of the community, especially the hopes they have learned to ignore. They don’t always offer solutions, but they always offer a vision or a symbol.

When I see a basket of farm stand peaches, I see God’s abundance, the sticky enthusiasm of a summer’s day. I see something rare, that will only be that sweet for a few weeks. I see an afternoon lost in a science fiction book when I have time off from middle school. I was with you guys on what you saw in a basket of peaches. And so was Amos, I think. Or at least he understood why we saw what we saw when we looked at a basket of summer fruit.

Here’s what Amos is asking.<sup>2</sup> What do you see if you are one of the seasonal farm workers in New Hampshire on an H2-A visa? What do you see if you are a Georgia peach farm owner and climate change is going to make it too hot to grow peaches on your family farm in another generation or two? What do you see if you sleep on the street and get your food out of a dumpster? What do you see if you are addicted to heroin?

Whatever those people see is not what we see, we who are well off, who have safe homes and people who love us, who will back us up if we fall into financial ruin, who will care for us if we get sick or addicted or broken. We see abundance. We see the goodness of God. We see reassurance that we are doing the right thing, because, look, summer fruit. A big, ole basket of peaches.

Yes, there is no way that anyone biting into a ripe peach could miss that God loves us. Nor should we. But we cannot let that close our ears and our hearts to what God asked of us. God expects us *to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with our God* (Micah 6:8) to quote the prophet Micah. When we look at a basket of summer fruit and see how much God loves us and how fantastic we must be to be loved to such an extent, and that’s all we see, then we are well on the path to making *the ephah small and the shekel great, and practice deceit with false balances, buying the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals, and selling the sweepings of the wheat.* (Amos 8:5-6) And that is what terrified Amos. That we would fail to do justice in this world because those of us who had advantages were so delighted with how everything was set up. Our failure to do the justice that God expected of us will take us out of

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas W. Mann, “Proper 11, Exegetical Perspective, Amos 8:1-12” in *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary, Year C, Volume 3*, ed. David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, [Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010], 245.

<sup>2</sup> Willis Jenkins, “Proper 11, Theological Perspective, Amos 8:1-12” in *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary, Year C, Volume 3*, ed. David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, [Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010], 246.

covenant relationship with God. And at that point, God has no obligation to speak to us any longer. Peaches are awesome, but we need the word of God to survive as a people.

That's what I see in both the prophecy from Amos and the story of Mary and Martha. It is so easy to get caught up in our own perspective and forget to listen to God. It isn't the doing that's wrong. It's the doing without listening. It isn't the listening that's wrong. It's the listening without doing.

A 100 years ago, on Monday, the Trustees concluded the sale of the parsonage. That took a lot of listening to the community, listening to God, listening to experts on all sorts of things, like septic tanks and knob and tube wiring and the local real estate market. That took a lot of doing, especially many, many, many trips to the transfer station. The parsonage was a resource we needed to steward. We needed to look at it and see how it would help us share the truth of God's love for us and the truth of God's expectations for justice and mercy. We've sold it. And now we need to steward the proceeds. We need to make sure that we're listening. We need to make sure that we're doing. We need to make sure that we're seeing not only what we want to see, but that we're looking for opportunities to recognize what others see.

That stewardship is not done just by the trustees or just by the minister or just the finance committee. It's done by all of us, together. Because we all have different perspectives and it takes all of us to see what is right in front of us. I needed K.J. sitting on the picnic table as much as I needed Jill to point it out to see something precious that I would otherwise have missed. So as we move forward, if you see something that it looks like we're missing, pull an Amos. Ask us what we are seeing. Because if we only see how God's abundance is telling us how fabulous we are, then we are missing an opportunity for justice and mercy. If we only take care of today's needs and don't think about caring for those who come after us, then we are missing an opportunity. If we hoard what we have out of fear of scarcity and make it much more difficult to do God's work today, then we are missing an opportunity.

It's hard work, both seeing *and* doing. It is a blessing to this community that we have so many people who are willing to do that hard work. The sale of the parsonage entailed so much hard work. So, I'll ask you to look again at this basket of summer fruit, this basket of peaches. And I'd like to ask Ann Desrochers, our moderator, to come forward and help us recognize those who have been peaches in service of this church in the sale of the parsonage.

[Ann's recognition & applause]

Please join me in prayer. O Holy One, we are listening, we are looking, we are doing. Help us to hear the words of the prophets that surround us, telling us to listen, to look, to do, not in our names, but in yours. Help us to share the love you have offered us in such abundance. Help us to pursue justice and mercy as you expect. We will listen and do. But we need your help and guidance to listen and do obedient to your will. Amen.