

“Maturity”

Amos 8:1-12; Colossians 1:15-28;
Luke 10:38-42

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In the beginning of the Amos passage, God shows Amos a bowl of summer fruit and then goes on, and I wondered what in the world is that all about? Why did God simply come and show Amos a bowl of summer fruit?

So I have here a bowl of summer fruit. At least it's one of the fruits that I think of during summer: a peach. I got it at the Farmer's Market yesterday. And there was a clue as I picked it up and I heard the farmer talking to another person and he said, "Do you want a today peach or a tomorrow peach?" Isn't that about the truth? When it's ripe, it's ready to eat.

I heard a comedian talking about having a cantaloupe, watching it and waiting until it was just right. It's so fast that you have to watch because soon it will be mushy. So she said, "When it's ripe, if it's ripe at 4:00 in the morning, I get my kids up and we eat it."

It's not quite that bad, is it? But there's a sense with summer fruit that when it's ripe it's ready. Which makes me think about what maybe God was saying to Amos: the time is ripe and God is going to act. God had seen enough of the needy being trampled and the poor being misused.

It made me also think about what Paul was doing when he wrote Colossians. His entry was saying look, you have faith, hope and love that helps set you straight. Then he gives this beautiful description of who Christ is. I think what he's saying is, God's fruit is ripe. The time is ripe to live into what Christ has brought and who Christ is. It's time to take that fruit. It's time to enter in to that faith. In fact, what he says is, "Let it become established and secure in your life. Let hope continue."

The time for what God has done is ripe, isn't it? What he's suggesting now, is it's also time for us. The time is ripe for us to not only eat the fruit, but there's a way in which he's saying we become that very fruit. In fact, he starts out with an orchard image, in which the fruitful produce fruit. We don't usually think about people becoming ripe, at least not usually. But generally we think about becoming mature.

Now when a peach gets ripe, what do we think about? We might think about the color and how beautiful it is, but I tend to think about what's on the inside and how juicy it is, what it's going to taste like. But I want to get it when it's ripe, because when it's not ripe it's hard and the juice isn't developed, and if it's too old it's mushy and not very good. But when it's ripe, when it's mature, when it's ready to eat... that's when I want the peach.

What is it for us to become mature? Isn't it to truly be secure and steadfast in our faith? To let hope be present and let the fullness of that hope lead us into glory, as Paul says? To let the love of God enter into our lives? Last week we talked about the will and love that we know in Christ as a plumb line for us to build our lives square with God. Today,

Paul's description is to live into Christ, to let the very love and will of God come to us, to allow this to be in us. All wonderful images, aren't they?

Then I hear what Jesus says when he's with Mary and Martha. I don't know about you, but I feel like we live in a Martha society. What Jesus says to Martha is that there are so many worries and distractions. Now, I've bought this nice little bowl of summer fruit, but I can set it on my counter and go on my way and forget about it when I begin to focus on my other worries and other distractions in my life. And what happens if I forget about it? It goes to waste. It's soon no good.

It doesn't feel like God ever quite goes away like the summer fruit does, rather the time is always ripe in our lives. And yet there are so many worries. Just think about all the worries in our personal lives. We might worry about how we're going to get to a particular place. We might worry that summer is going too fast. We might worry that we're not ready for school. We might worry about our health. We might worry about our finances. I bet we could make quite a list of the personal worries in our lives and how easy it is to get distracted by them.

And if that's not enough, what about the worries in the world around us? How many of you have been keeping track of what's been going on in the Gulf and wondering when that would be over? Well it's got a long way to be over, but at least the leak is stopped. And then, we have wars and rumors of war. We have concerns about financial systems. Worries, worries, all kinds of worries.

And if our worries aren't enough to distract us, do we have any other distractions in our lives? There's a certain set of expectations that come our way. Life is simply supposed to be fun, that we should be out all the time, that summer, after all, is the time when we should be enjoying every minute. Busy, busy, busy. Or there are distractions like television that are supposed to take our mind off of everything else. And perhaps it does. Sometimes I wonder if we don't need to be a little more mindful, noticing the very fruit God has given us in Christ.

I think that's what Paul is talking about in Colossians. He wants the Colossians, and us, to remember and notice what God has given us, that beautiful description of who Jesus is, of who Christ is to us. And that last line, what's the purpose? That we might become mature. That we might be presented to Christ mature. That we might, like the peach, become who we are made to be: those who allow faith to be secure and steadfast in our lives, who continue in hope into the very glory God has given, to show the very grace of God in our lives.

And the wonderful thing is, not only do we get to enjoy what God has given us, but we become the summer fruit for others. Our lives are ripe, mature, when filled with faith, hope and love. What a wonderful experience it is when we encounter those who are ripe in that way. We're invited in following Christ to become that way ourselves, to allow our lives to ripen in faith, hope, and love. Amen.