

Amos 8:1-12

This is what the Lord God showed me—a basket of summer fruit. 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. The songs of the temple shall become wailings on that day,” says the Lord God; “the dead bodies shall be many, cast out in every place. Be silent!” Hear this you that trample on the needy, and bring to ruin the poor of the land, 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, buying the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals, and selling the sweepings of the wheat.” The Lord has sworn by the pride of Jacob: Surely I will never forget any of their deeds. 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 sing again, like the Nile of Egypt? On that day, says the Lord God, I will make the sun go down at noon, and darken the earth in broad daylight. I will turn your feast 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. 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. 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.

Luke 10:38-42

Now as they went on their way, he entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet and listened to what he was saying. 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.” But the Lord answered her, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her.”

‘Paying Attention’

The B-I-B-L-E

Yes, that’s the book for me

It stands alone on the Word of God

The B-I-B-L-E

Henri Nouwen once wrote that lives, while full, are often unfulfilled. “Our occupations and preoccupations fill our lives to the brim. They prevent the Spirit of God from breathing freely within us and thus renewing our lives.” (sermon seeds, 7-17-16) When this happens to us, we are like that basket of summer fruit whose end has come. We feel like the Eveready Bunny whose battery energy has just burned out. We find ourselves repeatedly asking the question, ‘What’s the use?’ More often than not, the aching hole in our heart flares up into unbearable pain. When we ask God for a word of help, none comes, save for the thought, ‘Go look it up.’ If we do, and the Bible is the book we open, more often than not we are disappointed, because the Bible is not an answer book. No answers, only stories about sinners and saints, prayers, bits of sacred wisdom, God’s spin on the rise and fall of the Jewish nation, and ‘The Greatest Love Story Ever Told’. No answers, only an invitation to spend some time with the Written Word of God. Paying attention to The Word of the Lord is what people of faith like to do, because when we do, we find that the Word of the Lord, holds the power to sweep away the concerns of self that clog the arteries of our ego-centric mind; it makes us mindful of God’s Loving Presence within and among us; and it opens the door to our hearts so that the Holy Spirit can fill our hearts with the concerns of God.

In our Old Testament reading for today, the prophet Amos spoke about God’s concern over injustices in the market place. He pointed out that cheating, lending money at rates that kept the poor in perpetual poverty; charging more than the product’s worth; and, skimping on quality to make a buck, were economic injustices that were unholy and not tolerated by God. His words served to spark economic justice awareness in the social conscience of Jews. His words also caused faithful Jews who paid attention to them, to fall on their knees in prayer asking,: ‘O

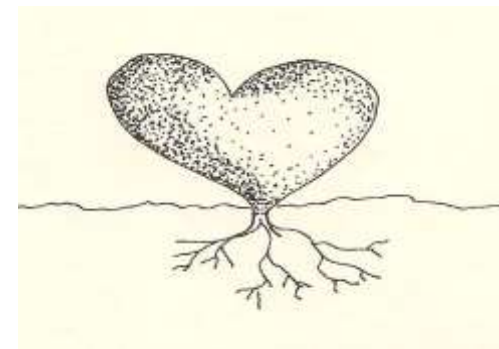
God, who may abide in your tent? Who may dwell on your holy hill? And to recognize Love's answer . . . The just will live in the presence of the Lord. . . as The Holy One's Word of New Life.

In our gospel story we find a woman named Mary kneeling at the feet of Jesus, attentively listening to his teachings on Love of God, neighbor, and self. It's another story about justice as a concern in God's heart and about energizing the spiritual dynamics of mutuality, equality, and reciprocity in human relationships. It's a short story in which Jesus' action spoke louder than his mind-boggling words of wisdom: "Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her." What was the action that upset everybody? In short, both Jesus and Mary did the religiously forbidden thing of ---a woman being taught as a male disciple was taught. Their mutual attentiveness introduced the idea of gender equality and an equal valuing of women into the cultural mindset of his day. And because it was the prophet Jesus who was doing the teaching, the eyes of faithful hearts were opened to the possibility that this equality matter was a major justice concern in the heart of God too. It's LGBTQ persons and souls who cannot feel their worth, who are kneeling at this throne of grace in open and affirming churches today.

'Mary has chosen the better part which will not be taken away from her.' I like to believe that when Mary listened to Jesus and Jesus listened to her, that Mary's heart was tethered to God's and the Holy Spirit breathed into her the Everlasting Breath of Renewed Life. I'm thinking that it might have felt something like what happened between the teacher and student in this story: 'Several years ago, a school teacher, who served on special assignment with children confined in a large city hospital, received a routine call requesting that she visit a child in room 409 who had been admitted and would require a long stay. She took the boy's name and room number and was told by the boy's regular teacher: "We're studying nouns and adverbs now. This boy needs help so he will not fall behind.." It wasn't until the visiting teacher reached the boy's room that she realized it was located in the hospital's burn unit. No one had prepared her

to confront a boy who had been horribly burned over much of his body and who was in great pain. She wanted to turn on her heel and walk out, but she stammered, "I'm the hospital teacher and your regular teacher asked me to help you with nouns and adverbs." Because of his cognition, the boy could barely respond. The teacher stumbled through the grammar lesson, but felt guilty for asking the boy questions or trying to correct him. The next morning, however, this teacher ran into a nurse on the burn unit who asked her. "What did you do to that boy in room 409? The teacher started to apologize, but the nurse interrupted. "You don't understand. We've been concerned about him. But ever since you were with him yesterday, his whole attitude has changed. He's fighting back responding to treatment like he wants to live." The boy himself later explained with tears dimming his eyes, "I had given up. But at my lowest moment the teacher came into my room. I suddenly realized that they wouldn't send a teacher to work on nouns and adverbs with a dying boy, would they? I decided I wanted to get well, if they thought I could. So I prayed, asking God to help me want to live. And here I am." The signs all around us may point to death and destruction, but God wants us to keep working on our nouns and adverbs. There's a lot of life yet to live and work to be done. (Homiletics (Nov. 2001) Wesley Taylor)

STAY ROOTED IN LOVE



Thank you, Jesus-God-Spirit who is Holy on us, for anointing us with your amazing Love. You dug a dwelling place and settled tenaciously forever, Amen, among us. Thank you Jesus-God-Spirit for your incredible grace. Amen.