

Text: Amos 8: 1- 12

Series: Being a Neighbour – Awakening to our Vision as a Church

Title: A basket of ripe fruit: When one person's flourishing is another person's end

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As Anglican Christians, we are called at various moments in our Christian calendar to respond to two important questions:

- (1) Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbour as yourself?
- (2) Will you strive for justice and peace among people, and respect the dignity of every human being?

I believe that how we respond to these words defines us as followers of Jesus the Christ.

Loving our neighbours as ourselves and respecting the dignity of every human being:

- On Canada Day – we looked at the demographics of our neighbours, and we considered who might be moving into Edgemont Village and the North Shore more broadly.
- A week later, we looked at the way of peace – the way we speak to our neighbours matters, our posture of blessing and giving the other space to receive it or not.
- And last week, we looked at Jesus' edgy teaching of a pilgrim's journey from Jerusalem to Jericho, as he was stripped of identity and rescued by an enemy – we considered the labels that divide us – causing some to belong and others to be excluded.

Today my friends, the prophet Amos has some strong words for us -

Words about our regard for those neighbours who live in the shadows of our community,
... in unjust situations.

Amos asks us to think about the issue: when one person's flourishing is another person's end.

Amos' words have caused me time and time again to re-evaluate my white middle class South African childhood.

The prominent image in today's reading is a basket of summer fruit.

Picture grapes, watermelon, pomegranates, figs, mangos.

The Hebrew word for fruit is: qayits

And the Hebrew word for end is: qets

Amos' clever wordplay asks us to ponder the situation: when one person's flourishing is another person's end.

Amos was writing in the years 760 – 750 BCE (mid 8th Century) – 2819 years ago.

During this time Jeroboam the 2nd was king of Israel

From the outside Jeroboam's 40 year reign brought prosperity to the kingdom of Israel.

We read in 2 Kings 14 and in Chronicles that under him Israel...

- Expanded the territory
- Increase in revenue
- Increase trade coming in (increase in prosperity)

Yet when we read Amos, we read another perspective..

- Amos, a prophet from Tekoa in Judah directed his words toward the nation of Israel.
- Amos was a large-scale herd breeder - he was in the sheep business.

And in chapter 8, Amos offers a social critique, he lays bare:

- Practices of corrupt business – false balances
- The selling and buying of people who lived in poverty – keeping people in debt by selling people into slavery
- Paying less than minimum wages – a pair of sandals indicate a minimum rate
- And adding sweepings into saleable food products – adding rubbish/refuse to make the sacks heavier and full, and expecting people to pay for the extra weight that is not food.

Israel was flourishing – but at whose expense?

In 2002, I attended a course on Amos, called: "Shattering indifference: Reading Amos from the margins" Classes were held on the Downtown Eastside, and we sat with people from different backgrounds and journeys reading these words together and applying it to our different contexts.

The major paper of the course called for a review of the primary context of our lives.

I chose to look at my South African upbringing:

I gained a deeper understanding how the structure of the country was set up in the late 1950's so that economic advancement was intended for white South Africans and that access to better forms of employment, education, housing, and land was simply out of the question for black Africans.

"Privilege was therefore the birthright of whites".

And Black People were restricted to unskilled and semiskilled labor sectors and an education system that only prepared them for these tasks.

White children born in the apartheid era were privileged to attend white only public schools with a limit of 20-30 students per class. The teachers were university trained (often to a masters level) and the schools were well equipped with computer laboratories, sports equipment and textbooks that were provided by the government's Department of Education.

At the end of the course I wrote a confession:

Lord God,
God over all,
Have mercy on me for I benefited from a sinful legacy.

I am a white South African, born into privilege.
I gained from others' loss:
My place in an elite education system, prohibited the learning of my black sisters and brothers in primary, secondary and tertiary schools;
I was given secure employment to earn wealth while others had no food to eat.

And deep inside there remains a white-pride
that I can only hope will one day be transformed.
I grieve; I agonize over my life as a white middle-class South African...

Have mercy on me.

This juxtaposition of prosperity and poverty, side by side, are scattered throughout the words written by Johnny Clegg - South African human rights musician who passed away this week:

There's a girl who lives in the high country
Where the willows do not weep
And the rain falls softly and gently
And does not disturb her sleep
There's a girl who lives in the high country
Who lives on tea and dreams...

But I am a bondsman - a poor man
I am a ghettoman - I am a thief
Who saw the gutterman who has no compassion
Who heard the widow who cannot weep
In the backstreets, in the poor towns
I hear a thunder which cannot roll
Mine are the eyes that steal from the orphanage
A groveller, groping in the grime

A basket of ripe fruit: When one person's flourishing is another person's end

What of here, what of now?

At General Synod last week, we heard the Rev Dr Andrea Mann (from VST) talk about modern day slavery that occurs right on our door step – talking about the local and global phenomena of human trafficking.

Human trafficking is the recruitment or movement of a person by deception or coercion for the purpose of exploitation.

People are bought and sold for sexual exploitation, forced labour, street crime, domestic servitude, or even the sale of organs.

In Vancouver, as a port and high-density city, you would be shocked to learn how many human beings (mostly girls and women) are moved in and out of this city against their will.

Numbers of trafficked people in Canada are difficult to establish with current data, however the report of the National Task Force on Sex Trafficking of Women and Girls in Canada notes that service agencies served more than 2,800 women and girls in a single year who had been trafficked for the sex trade alone.

Just like economics, human trafficking is fuelled by Supply and demand:

- When there is **demand**: pornography, sex tourism, cheap labour, consumerist behaviour
- And there is a **supply** because of economic disparities, unequal relationships of social power between men-women, illiteracy; inadequate educational and employment opportunities; erosion of traditional family values; and racial discrimination.

There will be the buying and selling of people who are poor and needy.

One person's flourishing will be another person's end

Friends you and I have positional power and resources.

Here are some everyday choices you can make to prevent and end human trafficking:
(from the World Council of Churches):

- Seek freedom from a lifestyle of consumerism (lower the demand)
- Ask questions about the products you buy – where are they from and under what conditions were they made?
- Support equal opportunities for education for all.
- Challenge those who make sexist or racist jokes.
- Promote gender equality and human dignity in your own life.
 - o Give women the same opportunities as men.
- Stop viewing pornography, if you do so. Find healthy ways to discover and celebrate your sexuality.
- Address your concerns to your elected officials regarding human trafficking and its root causes.
- Advocate for just refugee and immigration policies and safe paths of migration.

And pray - God have mercy on us.

Amen