

These comments present one interpretation of today's readings; other interpretations may be possible. Comments are best read with the readings.

www.montreal.anglican.org/comments/

© Chris Haslam

Amos 8:1-12

NRSV

God has shown Amos three visions of devastations he plans. Amos has persuaded him neither to ruin the crops nor to consume the land with fire, but when God has shown him that the Israelites don't *measure up*, he has entered no plea: God will destroy all sanctuaries, both to him and to pagan gods.

Now God shows Amos another vision. There is a play on words: in Hebrew, "summer fruit" and "end" (v. 2) sound alike. God will not "pass them by" (v. 2), i.e. he will no longer ignore the Israelites' erring ways: "the end has come". The *end-times* ("that day", v. 3) were known as *the Day of the Lord*. God will punish because merchants "trample on the needy" (v. 4): prohibited from commerce on the day of the "new moon" (v. 5) and on the Sabbath, they can't wait to resume their fraudulent business practices: selling partial measures of wheat and including chaff ("sweepings", v. 6). (Wheat was weighed in shekels, a standard unit of weight, with "balances" (v. 5). The "ephah" was about 20 litres or 4-5 gallons.) They will be charged and found guilty! (v. 7) To Israelites, sin literally polluted the land: earthquakes will occur because of human sin (v. 8); the land will rise and fall, killing many, as the "Nile" floods annually. People expected eclipses to precede the *Day* (v. 9). This day, expected to be a time of rejoicing over redress for oppression by enemies, will be a day of gloom (v. 10). (People donned "sackcloth" (drab garb) and shaved their heads in mourning; "it" is the earth.) Israel has failed to heed God's "words" (v. 11), spoken through prophets; therefore, as punishment, God will cease to *speak*, i.e. provide his advice to Israel. The country being (at least in theory) a theocracy, it will lack the ability to select leaders, to know when to wage war, etc. Without God's word, it will be a mess religiously and politically. They will frantically seek his word everywhere, from the Mediterranean to the Red Sea ("from sea to sea", v. 12) "but they shall not find it".

Psalms 52

NRSV

The psalmist asks a powerful enemy why he boasts of his evil deeds, most of which are verbal, i.e. slander ("tongue", vv. 2, 4; "lying", v. 3). God will punish the evil-doer (v. 5); the godly will see this; they will either be awestruck, or "fear" (v. 6) what God will do to him. Here the godly person ridicules the evil one, who has taken refuge in materialism ("riches", "wealth", v. 7). The psalmist, flourishing ("like a green olive tree", v. 8) in the Temple ("house of God") trusts in the love God promised in his covenant with Israel ("steadfast love"). He vows to thank God (perhaps in a sacrifice), and to proclaim God's ways in the Temple. In the Hebrew, v. 5 uses strong language. Perhaps the evil-doer will be tossed out of the Temple ("tent").

The Christians at Colossae lived in a society where many adhered to Greek cults. Vv. 15-20 are an early hymn about Christ ("He"); he is how we see (and access) God ("image"). *Angelology* was popular at the time; "thrones ... powers" (v. 16) were orders of angelic beings; each was "created", had its origin "in him", and exists "for him"; any power they have is subordinate to Christ's. The whole of creation – both heavenly and earthly – were created "through him", with his participation. He is also the "firstborn" (v. 18), the inheritor from the Father, of *created-ness*; he governs it, and is the cohesive power of the universe (v. 17). He existed "before all things", before the first creative act. Greeks saw the "head" (v. 18) as the body's source of life and growth. Christ is this to the Church, and "head" of it in the modern sense. He is "the beginning", the nucleus of the restoration of humanity to union with God, of the new *created-ness*. In his death ("blood of his cross", v. 20), resurrection, and ascension to the Father, he is the *forerunner* ("firstborn", v. 18) of our elevation to being with the Father, of our *reconciliation* with the Father (v. 20). Christians at Colossae tried to find ultimate power and truth in various deities, but in Christ all power and ultimate truth is present (v. 19).

Before the founding of the church at Colossae, the people there were "estranged ..." (v. 21). They are now with God, fully acceptable to him ("holy ...", v. 22), thanks to Jesus' fully human ("fleshly body") presence and death, so long as they keep to the truth of the gospel and the "hope" (v. 23) it offers (and shun Greek cults). This gospel is available to all ("to every creature"). Paul *extended the reach* of Christ's message; it was complete as he received it. In doing so, he suffered "afflictions" (v. 24). So "completing ... Christ's afflictions" tells of Paul's afflictions as *extending* Christ's – in no way was Christ's suffering incomplete. Greek cults limited knowledge of mysteries to initiates, but Christ came to make known God's "mystery" (v. 26) to all ("Gentiles", v. 27); it had been "hidden" (v. 26) in Old Testament times. Note "everyone" (three times) in v. 28.

Luke 10:38-42

NRSV

Luke emphasizes that Christ came for all: all sectors of society, all peoples, and both sexes. Samaritans, despised by Jews, are welcome in the Kingdom. Jesus has told the *seventy* that proclaiming his message demands unswerving commitment. The lawyer has learnt that his love should be for everyone; if it is, he has eternal life.

Now Jesus crosses Jewish cultural bounds: (1) he is alone with women who are not his relatives; (2) a woman serves him; and (3) he teaches a woman in her own house. To sit at someone's feet (v. 39) was to be his disciple. Mary is Jesus' disciple. Martha, while devoted to her home, is "distracted" (v. 40) by *busy-ness*. The "only ... thing" (v. 42) that is really needed is to listen to Jesus' message and proclaim it. This is the task that Mary has chosen; her role is exemplary. Jesus values Martha's role, but Mary's is "better". (The wording of v. 42a varies among early manuscripts. The differences change the interpretation.)

