

**Message: "Enemies, Now Reconciled"<sup>1</sup>**

**There are a lot of good things in the season of summer.** One of them is the farmer's market. Have you been recently? A good farmer's market is always packed with people loading up on special items that commercial grocery stores just don't have.

**One of the things I like is the down-to-earth feel of a farmer's market.** It's like an open-air warehouse for food. At some markets, there's an array of meats waiting to be cooked. It's fascinating and terrifying to see the parts of a pig in a refrigerated showcase. Pig ears, snouts, feet, even tails. It can be repulsive, even though they're delicious when properly cooked. You can find greens of every type. And let's not forget green beans, squash, sweet potatoes, corn and more.

**Yet, in the middle of the noise and chaos, there's one part of the market that's serene, at least visually.** It's the summer fruit displays. The fruit is beautiful! You find an array of colors, shapes, and sizes. The fuzzy peaches, sharp yellow bananas, bright red apples, deep purple grapes, colorful mixtures of lemons and limes, and the juicy red strawberries or cherries. In July, the fruit is ripe and perfect for picking.

**Looking back over the years, fruit was a special part of summer meals.** This didn't last. It was frustrating in the fall, seeing a marvelous cantaloupe waiting to be picked up only to take it back home and discover it had lost its sweetness. It was no longer enjoyable and usually ended up being discarded.

**God uses a similar visual image to help get the message across to Amos.** Knowing Amos was a bit of a farmer, God brings this narrative in a way Amos could thoroughly understand it. "What do you see?", God says. Amos mentions a fruit basket, and all the enjoyable things related to it may have come to his mind.

**But God didn't see ripe fruit.** God saw fruit that was on its way to being rotten. This fruit didn't have long before it began to be no good. This fruit is no longer filled with the life that comes from the vine.

---

<sup>1</sup> Some early material from <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/prophet-margins/sixth-sunday-after-pentecost-year-c-lectionary-planning-notes/sixth-sunday-after-pentecost-year-c-preaching-notes>

**God likens this scenario to people, to us.** God receives what people give. God sees abuse. God sees oppression. God sees inequality. God sees economic injustice. And so, because evil can't be in the presence of God, the Lord unfolds for Amos the plan of judgment. A change is needed for we aren't made to be God's enemies, but God's children.

**This isn't a God we often encounter in the newspaper or in the media today.** Today, God is being thrown in the middle of political wars, religious rivalries, and philosophical theories. There are a lot of people who want to use God to advance their way, their beliefs, their position. And yet, God always raises up a prophet to represent God's refusal to go along with such oppressive behavior.

**In Amos, we're able to refute any arguments God is not a God of the oppressed.** God acts to right the wrongs, not because of God is vindictive or likes to punish. The God of love and grace is not a God-who-abuses. God wants to reconcile with us. But this means change is needed and we, as humans, don't like change.

**I think it's important to look at who Amos is.** He's a herdsman and a tends sycamore trees. He's from another tribe. He's not seminary trained. He isn't commissioned or ordained. Amos doesn't have a license to preach. But he has an enormous job. His job is to give a message people don't want to hear. Quite frankly, he has the kind of job that can get you killed.

**If there's a shortage of prophets today, it may be because the same danger exists.** In fact, it may not be a danger of being killed. It's a greater danger. There's the danger of being called troublemaker. There's a danger when we make people uncomfortable, especially when you do these things, well, from the margins.

**The prophetic word isn't ours. It's God's.** And we can't presume to speak God's words unless God speaks to us first. When we rely on our own strength and understanding, that's when we fail. We need to follow the lead of God, seeking first a right relationship, before God will speak to and through us. We must learn to rely on God's will and strength, not just on history, tradition or nostalgia. That's why Paul points us to God in his letter to the group at Colossae.

**Paul, or someone in Paul’s community, knew the group was struggling.** They felt like they weren’t living up to expectations. No matter how hard they tried, no matter how simply they chose to live, no matter what they did, they just didn’t feel like they could get things right. Because they felt like they were falling short, it seemed like failure. And this created tension in their group. There was conflict over how to live, what to do.

**This sense of insufficiency can color our view of God.** We can start to see God as a God-who-cannot-be-pleased or a God-of-impossible-expectations. Perfectionism becomes the focus, rather than grace. Or it can feel like all we hear about is God’s judgment and punishment. This comes from the harshness of our lives. Nihilism, fatalism and abuse can color our view of God.

**These views, combined with the reality of spending time together as broken people in a broken world, cause hurt.** There are many people who are “church hurt.” Whether intentional or not, harm has been done. I’m not here to excuse the hurt, but to mourn the harm done. I remember all those who have been hurt, as you do, too.

**When our perception of God and our perception of people is shaded, it’s easy to see how we can lose our way.** We drift away from God’s ways. We lose our connection. We try other practices, hoping to reclaim our spiritual fullness. Yet we end up thirsty. Our spirits may feel dead. Some turn even further away. We can go from being spiritual persons to apathetic, spiritually insensitive persons to those who are dead in the spirit; enemies of God and those who love God.

**How do we find our way to having a whole, vibrant spirit?** Paul tells us we need to shift our perspective. We won’t find the answer inside ourselves. We don’t find the answer inside experiences. We won’t find the answer through any means we can imagine.

**The way to have a whole, vibrant spiritual life is to see and know Jesus for who and what he is: our Lord and Savior,** the one who redeems us and makes things right again. This is purely a matter of faith and trust. We can’t see or touch God. We can read the narrative of those who did. Christ’s love and grace are amazing and life-giving.

**This gives us hope.** There's good news and it's simple: Jesus came to save us from our selfish, greedy ways. Jesus cares for our hurts and tends our wounds so we can heal. He came to be with us to know what we face and show us a new way. Jesus is the firstborn, inviting us to join him as a member God's family. Regardless of our fears, in spite of our failures, even when we doubt, Jesus welcomes us and cares for us with love and mercy.

**God wants to reconcile with us.** The problem is we aren't always ready to reconcile with God. Our ego and pride get involved. We want things to go our way. And so, we become like summer fruit, slowly rotting within. We can even get to the point where we artificially lift up our hurts, our brokenness. It can become almost a badge we wear.

**So, what can we do when we're facing the trials of life, when we feel down, spiritually empty?** I don't have it all figured out. But here's one thing I can offer: it's called cosmic love judo.<sup>2</sup> Jeff Warren shares this tip from his experiences with ADHD and a time when he broke his neck in his twenties. He's a coauthor of "Meditation for Fidgety Skeptics." Jeff invites us to shift our perspective.

**Rather than looking at our problems as trials sent to confound and test us, we can see our problems as a way for us to help others.**

Whatever you're going through, there are other people going through it. Most of those people don't have the faith and hope you have. Those outside of the community of faith don't know God loves them and Jesus came to save them and be with them. You do. You have something to offer: your love and the ability to share from your experience.

**Here's how it works. Let's do a spiritual exercise.** The next time you are in the middle of one of your challenges, you can do this. Stop what you're doing. Close your eyes and take a couple of deep breaths. Name the challenge you're facing. Accept it for what it is without resisting or tension. Now, I invite you to think about someone you love. See their face in your heart and mind. Imagine their smile when they're surprised. Imagine the look in their eyes when they're filled with joy. Imagine the way they laugh. Focus on their well-being. Pray for them .... Hold the

---

<sup>2</sup> *Calm app, daily meditation, July 2022*

image of this one you love in your mind as you breath, slowly and deeply for a few minutes.

**How do you feel?** God’s love and grace are most effective when we stop resisting, accept our situation and then, remaining in the present, share the love we’ve received with another person.

**Jesus makes this possible, for all who are spiritually poor receive God’s blessings** (Matthew 5). And this is how we can pass God’s blessings on to others, transforming our pain into healing, reconciling our separation from God and others through the power of love.

**Last week, we began to share God’s blessings.** I know you’ve had the opportunity give and receive blessings since then. So let’s take a few minutes to share. Please turn to the person seated next to you and ask this question:

**“What blessings did you give or receive this week?”**

Keep it short, you can tell the whole story during our social time later.

I invite each of you to do so now.

**Thank you for sharing.** I know it’s new. Change is uncomfortable. It’s okay if you’re not sure what to say. Our time of sharing isn’t for the purpose of making you feel badly about yourself. It’s to help you hear how God is blessing you, all the time and in many ways. I hope you’ll begin to anticipate and look forward to how God is blessing you each moment of every day.

Let us pray:

*Lord, help us to trust you, each and every day. Give us the boldness to speak in your name, to offer your love to a world hurting and in need of hope. Help us to follow you and be transformed by your love so we may bless others with the same love. Bless us when we live generously, sharing your love with others. We commit ourselves to you in faith and in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

**Amos 8:1-6, 11-12 (CEB)**

This is what the Lord God showed me: a basket of summer fruit. He said, "Amos, what do you see?"

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 forgive them.  
On that day, the people will wail the temple songs,"  
says the Lord God;  
"there will be many corpses,  
thrown about everywhere.  
Silence."

Hear this, you who trample on the needy and destroy  
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,  
make the ephah smaller, enlarge the shekel,  
and deceive with false balances,  
in order to buy the needy for silver  
and the helpless for sandals,  
and sell garbage as grain?"

The days are surely coming, says the Lord God,  
when I will send hunger and thirst on the land;  
neither a hunger for bread, nor a thirst for water,  
but of hearing the Lord's words.

They will wander from sea to sea,  
and from north to east;  
they will roam all around, seeking the Lord's word,  
but they won't find it.

**Colossians 1:15-23 (CEB)**

The Son is the image of the invisible God,  
the one who is first over all creation,

Because all things were created by him:  
both in the heavens and on the earth,  
the things that are visible and the things that are invisible.

Whether they are thrones or powers,  
or rulers or authorities,  
all things were created through him and for him.

He existed before all things,  
and all things are held together in him.

He is the head of the body, the church,  
who is the beginning,  
the one who is firstborn from among the dead  
so that he might occupy the first place in everything.

Because all the fullness of God was pleased to live in him,  
and he reconciled all things to himself through him—  
whether things on earth or in the heavens.

He brought peace through the blood of his cross.

Once you were alienated from God and you were enemies with him in your minds, which was shown by your evil actions. But now he has reconciled you by his physical body through death, to present you before God as a people who are holy, faultless, and without blame. But you need to remain well established and rooted in faith and not shift away from the hope given in the good news that you heard. This message has been preached throughout all creation under heaven. And I, Paul, became a servant of this good news.