

**Faithful Listeners, by Daniel H. Kuhn, Jr. 08080722**  
**Amos 8:1-12 and Luke 10:38-42**  
**Elon Community Church, United Church of Christ, 22 July, 2007**

What did I do in the past four weeks while I was gone? I did a lot of construction on our log cabin in the Finger Lakes region of New York State. I put drywall on our rooms in the basement, reconstructed the header on the stairs to the basement, and I planned next year's construction of a gate for toddlers on our deck. I watched a grandson grow for a month and watched my younger daughter Maggie be a mother. I celebrated the fifty year anniversary of the formation of the UCC along with seven thousand others in Hartford, Connecticut. I was proud of the pioneers of the past who served as pilgrims and abolitionists who ordained the first African American and the first woman and the first openly gay person. And, I was proud of present day members of the UCC: General Minister and President John Thomas, columnist Leonard Pitts; editor Bill Moyers; Senator Barak Obama, and the inventor of the laser, Dr. Charles Townes.

But, while I was gone, I lost one of my best friends, Evelen Terrell. I also lost Doug Marlette, the creator of the comic strip Kudzu, author of the book *The Bridge* and resident of Hillsborough, NC.<sup>1</sup> My favorite brother-in-law and my daughters' favorite uncle, David, contracted inoperable lung cancer. He looks forward only to pain and suffering. My three sisters and my brother and my brothers-in-law and I had a great time remembering and re-connecting during a three-day reunion at our log cabin. And finally, while we were away, our daughter Emily gave birth two weeks early to our granddaughter, Miller Susanne Motley. I drove directly from Central New York to Holly Springs, North Carolina to change a dirty diaper. Such is the variety of this human life that we live.

Lives come and go. We build and we celebrate. We depart and we reconnect. And along with the highs come the dirty diapers! How do we live life? How do we endure?

The prophet Amos and the disciple Mary tell us we endure by listening. What could be more refreshing than a basket of summer fruit: peaches, strawberries, raspberries, cherries, grapes and nectarines. These are the fruits of God's gifts for us to savor. They nourish and, I understand, they are a lot healthier for our systems than so many of those processed and manufactured foods we eat.

The prophet Amos had a vision of a basket of summer fruit, but the words that follow are not refreshing at all. They are scary: "The end has come. The songs of the temple shall become wailings. There will be many dead bodies scattered in every place. These are not nice words to hear on a Sunday morning or anytime. What did the prophet have in mind?

I remember meeting Amos for the first time during college. I was formally introduced to him by Bernhard Anderson.<sup>2</sup> Amos had a profound effect on my spiritual development. Amos did not even call himself a prophet. He referred to himself as a herdsman from Tekoa, and as a dresser of sycamore trees. He was a dual career person. King Amaziah didn't want to see or hear this man, because his words were accusatory. He said that God would utterly destroy the nation Israel. There would be nothing left.

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<sup>1</sup>Born: December 6, 1949 in Greensboro, NC. Died: July 10, 2007, in a car crash in a heavy rainstorm in Marshall County, Mississippi

<sup>2</sup>*Understanding the Old Testament* by Bernhard W. Anderson, © 1957, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc.

So now, we see the significance of Amos' vision about a basket of summer fruit. In the Hebrew, there is a pun—a play on words between “end” and “basket of summer fruit.” *Qayits* means “basket of summer fruit”. *qets* means “end”. The vision God gave to Amos was about the end of Israel.

Why would the nation come to an end? Shekels, silver, sandals, and the sweepings of the wheat. Society had become corrupt and greedy. Those with political and economic power did whatever they could, no matter how much it hurt others, to get richer and more powerful. They made the ephah, or bushel measure small, so they could make more shekels. They sold the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals, and they sold the sweepings of the wheat.

What's wrong with selling the sweepings of the wheat? God's command was that what was left over after the harvest of wheat was to be made available for the poor and hungry to sweep up and eat. It was a divine welfare system. As merchants sold the sweepings of the wheat, those who were poor and hungry starved. And God didn't like it.

Amos told me that one day I will be called into account for my actions. Do I treat people justly and fairly? Do I take advantage of my power or wealth to put others to disadvantage? Do I treat others as though they too are God's children?

The way we act does make a difference. If it doesn't make a difference to you, it does to others, and it does to God. Oppression of the poor and the needy by those with economic power is an abomination to God. God will punish the people for their crimes against one another.

Let's go back to the refreshing aspect of summer fruit, for there is good news here. A bunch of grapes is tasty, nutritious, thirst-quenching. God has planted you as a grape vine with tender care. God watered your roots, pulled the weeds from around your base so you could breathe freely, and gave you sunshine to grow and prosper. Through the seasons you matured. You blossom and grapes form in bunches. Imagine the grapes as gifts to nourish and refresh others.

What is the nature of your fruit? What are you bearing for God? What are the ways in which you can use your gifts of ministry for God and to serve others? You as a grape vine can't eat your own fruit— that doesn't work.

We did not confess Jesus Christ as our Savior in order just to sit here and be entertained, did we? We did not confess Jesus Christ just so we could go to heaven in the sweet bye and bye, did we? We confessed Jesus Christ to be part of his vine and branches. We are grafted onto the vine to bear fruit to nourish others in his love. God has carefully and wonderfully created us to be refreshing fruit for a thirsty and hungry world.

Through the ups and downs of this life, through the squeals of joy and smells of dirty diapers, listen to Amos and Jesus. Be like a basket of summer fruit to this hungry and thirsty world.