



First Mennonite Church

Midweek E-Newsletter

July 13, 2022

From Pastor Tom

“A Basket of Summer Fruit”

Summer is the season of fresh fruit! What are your favorites? Mine currently are watermelon and peaches (especially Colorado peaches). I’m looking forward to Jirak’s getting their first shipment of peaches in, and already plan to buy a large box of them. And in the meantime, I eat watermelon like there’s no tomorrow! I like to cut it up into small chunks, put it in the refrigerator until it’s good and cold, and then reach in there for a refreshing (and relatively healthy) snack at any time of day or night. But I’ve noticed that once I’ve cut it up, if I don’t eat it up quickly enough, it starts to turn sour. And sour watermelon just isn’t a pleasure to eat, no matter how cold it is.

In one of the lectionary passages for this coming Sunday, the prophet Amos records another vision of something the Lord God “showed” him (last Sunday, you’ll remember, was a plumb line). This time, it’s “a basket of summer fruit.” Which sounds refreshing and enjoyable, right? But apparently, this fruit had turned sour. The original Hebrew has a word play between two words, the first is *qayitz*, and the second, *qetz*. They sound very similar when pronounced. But while *qayitz* means “basket of summer fruit,” *qetz* means “end.” And as the passage continues (read Amos 8:1-12), the message God wants Amos to deliver to Israel becomes horrifically clear: what started out to be refreshingly beautiful and faithful to God’s will has turned ugly, sour, and unfaithful to God’s will, because of which, its end is at hand. And if you read the passage through, you’ll find that the end is not pretty at all.

As I said in my sermon this past Sunday, God’s critique of and judgements against Israel in the book of Amos are essentially twofold: 1) they (and especially their leaders) are not caring for justice (or fairness) for the poor in their land, because of which 2) their worship practices are empty and hypocritical. And in Amos 8:1-12, God gets quite specific. They hurry through their holy days (whether a feast, or even just the Sabbath) so they can get back to selling their own grain to add to their already significant wealth (Amos 8:5, first half). Moreover, they “make the ephah small and the shekel great” (meaning they make their measure of grain subtly smaller, and charge more for it. In other words, they cheat—and it’s the poor that pay the price (figuratively and literally; Amos 8:5, second half).

I asked in this last Sunday's sermon whether we in the U.S., and even at FMC, are "straight and true," or "crooked and untrue" when held up against our plumb line, which is Scripture, and which repeatedly calls us to care for the poor in our own community and world. I pointed out the ways we do care for the poor, namely by supporting such local ministries as Care Portal and Main Street Ministries, and our own Mennonite relief agency MCC. But I also stated the obvious that "we can always do more," and that we should take the time to evaluate all the ways we spend our money (as demonstrated, for example, in our church budget), to see if we are caring for the poor as much as we "care" for ourselves. I also suggested that we need to consider whether (or when) the time has come for us to speak prophetically to the leaders in our land, about their responsibility to care for the poor.

But as Jesus himself said once, there will always be poor in our community and our world, and our first priority must always be our relationship with him (Matthew 26:11). Which is not to say we don't need to care for the poor, but rather that we should do it for the right reasons. One of the reasons I love the Mennonite Church is that they—we—continually remind ourselves of the mandate to care for the poor, and to prophetically hold our local, national, and world leaders to the same standard. Because the Bible is clear that that is what God requires of us (see Micah 6:8). And so, when Scripture takes us there (as it does in Amos, Micah, Isaiah, the Psalms, the four gospels, and on and on), we must listen and obey. But let us make no mistake: our first priority must always be our relationship with Jesus. So how are we doing in our relationship with Jesus? Hopefully it is fresh, beautiful, and sweet to the taste. Kind of like a basket of summer fruit is when fresh off the vine.

Among Our Friends and in Our Prayers

- ✪ Continue praying through the directory this week for:
- ✪ Pray for those having cancer treatments.
- ✪ Pray for families as they grieve and anticipate memorial services.

Upcoming Events

- ✪ **Memorial Service on Saturday at 2:00 pm.** Thank you to those who have signed up to help for the lunch afterwards. Please arrive around noon to help in the kitchen.
- ✪ **Urgent Feedback Needed for New Opportunity!** We have been invited to host and/or serve a historical Mennonite meal at the Hillsboro Arts and Crafts Fair on September 17th. This is needing to be decided quickly, so PLEASE help us

determine if we have enough interest and willing participants. This would be one of those chances to share the love of Jesus that would take the whole village as we were reminded lately! Call or email the church office. We need to hear from you, both yes and no availabilities. THANKS!

- ☞ **This Sunday:** At 9:30 adults will gather in the chapel to watch a short video and have a lively discussion on the “Half Truth” of “Love the sinner, hate the sin”!

Other Announcements

- ☞ **Thank you** so much for all your help in providing cookies for the Summer Food 4 Kids program. The freezers are full and we have enough to finish off the last 5 weeks. So, turn off the ovens and take a cool break.
Norma Duerksen, Coordinator
- ☞ **Help Wanted:** Our family at Parkside Homes have requested a DVD copy of our Sunday Worship Service to watch. The copy is being made in the office and we are looking for someone willing to deliver that to the activity director there each week? (You could always stop in and say “Hi” to our friends there occasionally too!)
- ☞ Thanks to the 4 more people who added to our display of family **favorite hymns!** We are **still accepting more!** Join in the fun by sharing your five favorites and give us the joy of singing them with you in worship on Sunday mornings!
- ☞ **Thanks** to all who have so generously been sharing their **gifts with the Care Portal** needs. Leadership is feeling very blessed helping people with their physical needs. She says, “hopefully, we are also planting some seeds in their lives for Jesus to grow. It is such a blessing to me to be able to meet many of them in person and know that we are helping them in Jesus’ name!” (Talk to her to hear some encouraging stories!)
- ☞ A **thank you note arrived** from Camp Mennoscah. Check it out on the east bulletin board.
- ☞ **Thanks for the memorial bulletins** that greatly increased our display in the hall! (So glad one of our members was cleaning things out. Maybe you can come to my house next! Heehee!)
- ☞ **Colorado peaches are back for the Colorado MCC Relief Sale fundraiser.** They come to MCC in North Newton for pick-up around August 22. A 10 lb. box for \$27 or 18 lb. box for \$38 and must be ordered and paid for by July 25. Call 316.283.2720 or email patsydirksen@mcc.org.

Verse of the Week: John 7:37-38

“If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink.

Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.”