

BE READY FOR THE EXPECTED
22ND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

AMOS 5:18-24
NOV. 9, 2014

¹⁸ Woe to you who desire the day of the Lord!

Why would you have the day of the Lord?

It is darkness, and not light,

¹⁹ as if a man fled from a lion, and a bear met him, or went into the house
and leaned his hand against the wall, and a serpent bit him.

²⁰ Is not the day of the Lord darkness, and not light,
and gloom with no brightness in it?

²¹ "I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies.

²² Even though you offer me your burnt offerings
and grain offerings, I will not accept them;
and the peace offerings of your fattened animals, I will not look upon them.

²³ Take away from me the noise of your songs;
to the melody of your harps I will not listen.

²⁴ But let justice roll down like waters,
and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

Once in college I had class I was doing well in,
wanted to totally ace final exam, get top grade,
so I studied all night, but test grade ruined my overall score
because I feel asleep twice during test.

That is example of expecting or anticipating something
but in way that makes us not ready when it happens.
like watching out window for important dinner guest
without noticing dinner is burning on the stove,

This is what happened to wedding attendants in today's gospel
who were waiting but not ready when time came
and so were left out.

This gospel is picture of what is described in today's epistle:
anticipating the day Jesus' returns in majesty
to take us to heaven.

Israelites in Amos' day also looking forward to day of the Lord,
day when he came in a powerful way to help them.

But Amos says be careful what you expect.

Some say: be ready for the unexpected.

Amos says: be ready for what you do expect.

GOD'S COMING WILL NOT BRING ALL WE MAY EXPECT
OUR COMING TO WORSHIP IS NOT ALL GOD EXPECTS
GOD'S OWN SACRIFICE BRINGS WHAT HE EXPECTS

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Israel desiring the day of the Lord was like

little brother fighting with brother or sister and saying:
just you wait until Dad gets home.

but when Dad gets home and starts asking questions

he finds little brother is also at fault & he gets punished.

In O.T. "day of the Lord" usually refers to when God acts

in power to rescue Israel & defeat threatening enemies

Amos says, why do you want God to come & blast evildoers
when you yourselves are evildoers?

Were like man who called 911 about being robbed with gun
& when police came they found he was doing drug deal.

Amos says, you are afraid of attack by humans

but are jumping from frying pan into fire.

You will be like a man who hides from lion in the woods

but there a bear attacks him,

And he runs into his house and slams the door

and as he pants, with hand leaning against a wall,

a snake comes out of the wall and bites him.

i.e. God will not let you escape what you deserve.

We, too, tend to desire justice from God or man
against our opponents.

We watch for the demanding boss or annoying neighbor
or schoolyard bully or nasty ex or worthless politician
to finally get what they deserve.

We must realize that God's justice means
judgment on us as well.

I have noticed sometimes what psychologists call transference:
people assuming of others what is true of themselves.

I have been criticized by certain people for faults,

- like refusing to listen to the opinions of others -

that I have realized are actually faults of that person.

It causes me to reflect on whether
things that most annoy me about other people
might actually be particular faults of my own.
This is an important thing to think about
when I come to God in prayer and when I come to worship.

OUR COMING TO WORSHIP IS NOT ALL GOD EXPECTS

²¹ "I hate, I despise your feasts,
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and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

Once when camping, I cooked supper inside enclosed shelter
where I set my stove on picnic table,
cooked pasta dish that came in a pouch.

When I was eating it, I noticed black things like caraway seeds
I hadn't noticed before, wondered exactly what it was.

Next day I saw sprinkles of same in that spot on table
and realized bats were hanging directly above.

What I assumed was delicious was actually disgusting.

This is what God was saying about Israelite worship.

They thought their sacrifices were pleasing aroma to God,
but he said they turn my stomach.

They thought their songs were beautiful melodies.

God said: I can't stand the racket.

Because what they said and did in worship
was ruined by nasty things they did in rest of life.

While expecting God's blessing on themselves
their unjust, unrighteous life was not blessing to others.

Same would be true of our worship if we praised God,
singing about how wonderful, powerful and majestic he is
with assumption this great God is on our side,
without first repenting of our sins & asking for mercy.

Or if we brought what we thought was generous offering
while way we made this money or used rest of it
was tainted by greed, selfishness or dishonesty.

Amos says let justice flood like water over everything evenly,
not just isolated puddles or sprinkles of it in our life.

Let righteousness keep flowing like river, not gully drying up
or like faucet you turn on & off when you feel like it.

If Amos called for justice in our society today, he might point out
we have problem with 4th commandment about authorities,
behaving like no one has right to tell me what to do
as if they know better than me.

we have problem with 5th commandment about killing,
living careless lifestyles that are unhealthy for us
and create unhealthy environment for others.

we have problem with 6th commandment about sexuality,
displaying it everywhere & using it to sell everything
as if it were nothing special and exclusive.

we have problem with 7th commandment about stealing,
as if I can use any data/content can I get as I please,
while meanwhile trying to stay anonymous
so I am not accountable for anything I say or do.

we have problem with 8th commandment about reputations
when we assume worst of others different from me
and don't realize how we are effected by prejudices.

we have problem with 9th & 10th commandments on greed
when we assume we have right to all we can get
without thinking about how it might keep others
from having what they need.

Keeping first table of the law, about relationship with God,
cannot be separated from 2nd table about loving neighbor.

Point is, just coming to church, going through motions
& saying right things, is not all God expects of our worship.
So, why do we come to worship & what can we expect from it?

GOD'S OWN SACRIFICE BRINGS WHAT HE EXPECTS

²² Even though you offer me your burnt offerings
and grain offerings, I will not accept them;
and the peace offerings of your fattened animals,
I will not look upon them.

Text itself may seem like Amos' description of day of the Lord:
gloom & darkness with no brightness in it.

It is all condemnation & no comfort.

In fact, this is true of whole book of Amos until end.
He may seem like old grump saying nothing good on anything.

We may ignore him as just crank except he is God's prophet
and so every word he uses is important,
including word he uses to describe the offerings:
it is always "your" offerings.

Here is a crack left open through which we see light of hope.

Our offerings may be unacceptable because there is nothing
we ourselves can do to make selves acceptable to God.

But are there any sacrifices God will accept? Yes.

He accepts his own sacrifice, the sacrifice of Jesus.

Reason we can eagerly look forward to day of the Lord
when he comes again in glory with all his holy angels

to take us with him to heaven,

is because we look back on day of the Lord when he came
humbly to suffer, not surrounded by holy angels
but by poor & needy, sinners & thieves.

God did come to deal with unrighteousness & get rid of sinners
by getting rid of our sins.

He did bring punishment for all our sin, but first he took them
& put them on Jesus who took punishment in our place.

Jesus is the fattened lamb that God looks on when we sin.

He is the offering that God accepts as payment in full.

He is the peace offering God finds delightful, not disgusting.

So, we look forward to this day of the Lord, expecting first
that God will not deal with the faults & injustice of others
but with our own.

This is how things are turned around so we find here
the gleam of hope instead of gloom.

and we delight in this sacred assembly
and eagerly desire God's feast and not despise it.

Because when we flee into this house & put out our hand to rest
God places into it the body & blood of Jesus.

When we expect God's mercy before his majesty
and watch for his grace before his justice
then our expectations are not disappointed.

GOD'S COMING WILL NOT BRING ALL WE MAY EXPECT

It is not just for humiliating our enemies but humbling us.

so OUR COMING TO WORSHIP IS NOT ALL GOD EXPECTS

not just going through motions here but actions in daily life.

but GOD'S OWN SACRIFICE BRINGS WHAT HE EXPECTS

Jesus' sacrifice brings us God's mercy & rescue from sins.