

# What About Me? ... God

## (Amos 4)

### *You Never Got Hungry for God*

<sup>1</sup>"Listen to this, you cows of Bashan  
grazing on the slopes of Samaria.  
You women! Mean to the poor,  
cruel to the down-and-out!  
Indolent and pampered, you demand of your husbands,  
"Bring us a tall, cool drink!"

<sup>2</sup>"This is serious--I, GOD, have sworn by my holiness!  
Be well warned: Judgment Day is coming!  
They're going to rope you up and haul you off,  
keep the stragglers in line with cattle prods.  
<sup>3</sup>They'll drag you through the ruined city walls,  
forcing you out single file,  
And kick you to kingdom come."  
GOD's Decree.

<sup>4</sup>"Come along to Bethel and sin!  
And then to Gilgal and sin some more!  
Bring your sacrifices for morning worship.  
Every third day bring your tithe.  
<sup>5</sup>Burn pure sacrifices--thank offerings.  
Speak up--announce freewill offerings!  
That's the sort of religious show  
you Israelites just love."  
GOD's Decree.

<sup>6</sup>"You know, don't you, that I'm the One  
who emptied your pantries and cleaned out your cupboards,  
Who left you hungry and standing in bread lines?  
But you never got hungry for me. You continued to ignore me."  
GOD's Decree.

<sup>7</sup>"Yes, and I'm the One who stopped the rains  
three months short of harvest.  
I'd make it rain on one village  
but not on another.  
I'd make it rain on one field  
but not on another--and that one would dry up.  
<sup>8</sup>People would stagger from village to village  
crazed for water and never quenching their thirst.  
But you never got thirsty for me.  
You ignored me."  
GOD's Decree.

<sup>9</sup>"I hit your crops with disease  
and withered your orchards and gardens.  
Locusts devoured your olive and fig trees,  
but you continued to ignore me."  
GOD's Decree.

<sup>10</sup>"I revisited you with the old Egyptian plagues,  
killed your choice young men and prize horses.  
The stink of rot in your camps was so strong  
that you held your noses--  
But you didn't notice me.  
You continued to ignore me."  
GOD's Decree.

<sup>11</sup>"I hit you with earthquake and fire,  
left you devastated like Sodom and Gomorrah.  
You were like a burning stick  
snatched from the flames.  
But you never looked my way.  
You continued to ignore me."  
GOD's Decree.

<sup>12</sup>"All this I have done to you, Israel,  
and this is why I have done it.  
Time's up, O Israel!

Prepare to meet your God!"

<sup>13</sup>Look who's here: Mountain-Shaper! Wind-Maker!  
He laid out the whole plot before Adam.  
He brings everything out of nothing,  
like dawn out of darkness.  
He strides across the alpine ridges.  
His name is GOD, God-of-the-Angel-Armies.

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I love the way the passage from the Gospel ended this morning. It is from Eugene Peterson's version of the Bible called **The Message**. Here Jesus says: "If you walk around with your nose in the air you are going to end up flat on your face. But if you are content to be simply yourself, you will become more than yourself" Now think back to what we read at the end of in Amos 8.1: "Indolent and pampered, you demand of your husbands, "Bring us a tall, cool drink!"

Do you see what Amos is doing here at the beginning of chapter 4? He is speaking to those people in Israel who were the most affluent. Particularly he is addressing the women. Not because the men have no part to play in this, rather at this juncture he seems to see how the women of Israel have their noses high in the air and they have the attitude, "We deserve everything we have coming to us that is good. We expect of those who are here to serve us to do just that. Not only those who are our servants but they were also being bossy towards their husbands, saying to them "bring me another tall cool drink."

We get a sense in these opening verses that this was the attitude that governed the people Amos is addressing here. These were people with money. These were people, who if they lived today, would shop til they dropped, thinking of no one but themselves. They were self absorbed, taking inventory of their clothing and accessories.

Then regularly they would show up at Bethel for their time of corporate worship. They were a very religious people, seemingly devout in their worship. Or so it appeared. We will get to that in a minute. Before we consider their worship, look at what God says

in verse 2:

<sup>2</sup>"This is serious--I, GOD, have sworn by my holiness! Be well warned: Judgment Day is coming! They're going to rope you up and haul you off, keep the stragglers in line with cattle prods.

I also want to read this in the New Revised Standard Version. "The Lord GOD has sworn by his holiness: The time is surely coming upon you, when they shall take you away with hooks, even the last of you with fishhooks." What is interesting about this is the reference to fishhooks. The Assyrians were the superpower of the seventh century. In 721 they were going to come into Israel and take the Israelites away. Archeologists have found there are Assyrian relief's of prisoners being taken away with ropes attached to hooks through the nose or through the lips of the prisoners. So here some 35 or 40 years before 721, Amos says, "I can see where your attitude and actions are taking you." The Assyrians are going to come and put hooks into your noses and lips and take out of here and lead you into Assyria.

Now what is so significant about this verse? Look at what God says, "This is serious, I have sworn by my holiness. When God makes an oath he means it. When God makes an oath he is going to follow through on what he said he was going to do. It is not only that God is making an oath, but also he says, "I am swearing by my holiness"

I am a holy God and you Israel are to be a holy people. You are to be set apart and different from the people around you. But you are just as concerned with your wardrobe and all of those material goods that can so easily become idolatrous. You think more about these things than you do about me and so there is going to be a consequence for your actions.

But before he speaks more about these consequences there is a shift. At the beginning of the Eucharist we begin with a call to worship. That call is found on page one of your bulletin this morning. Part of what we said today was these words: "Who is it that you seek? We seek the Lord our God." At verse four Amos is being sarcastic. Amos loves to use sarcasm to make his point. Listen to these words read sarcastically.

"Come along to Bethel and sin! And then to Gilgal and sin some more! Bring your sacrifices for morning worship. Every third day bring your tithe. Burn pure sacrifices--

thank offerings. Speak up--announce freewill offerings! That's the sort of religious show you Israelites just love."

Did you get it in the Gospel? This is the judgement of Jesus towards the Pharisee. He was very religious. He loved a religious show. But Jesus says, "I tell you it was the tax collector and not this actor that went home righteous before God"

What has happened to the Israelites worship? Look again at verse 4

The offerings being specified here were only to be brought every year or every three years. But they were bringing them every day and every third day. Do you see what the Israelites are doing? They were using these offerings as a sort of security blanket for them. They said: "We are only supposed to bring this offering every three years. We are going to do it every three days. We are to bring this other offering only every year but we will bring it every day and won't God be pleased with us? Isn't God going to be impressed with us? Look at how devout we are in our religious practices." But what does God say? "That's the sort of religious show you Israelites just love."

So here Amos has begun be critiquing the most wealthy in Israel who though they might love this religious show, Amos says you know what? Your life is a show. They want to look good in terms of how they dress and they want to look good before God and others when they come to worship.

Now there is something most passionate at verse 5. We have here what is in music called a crescendo. A crescendo is when the music gets louder and louder and louder and then it gets to the point where all the interments come in the cymbal goes "crash" and the whole thing kind of explodes. The writing in verses 5 and following has about it the quality of a musical crescendo.

Notice what God is saying here. God is speaking about judgements. The first three are what we might call environmental judgements. Judgements relating to nature.

Verse 6. "This is a judgement about famine. You know, don't you, that I'm the One who emptied your pantries and cleaned out your cupboards, Who left you hungry and standing in bread lines?" Then get the punch line: You continued to ignore me."

Verse 7 speaks of the drought that would come along the land. In Israel the spring rains occur from February to the end of March and the Barley harvest is in May and June. In this year the rains did not come. There was a drought in the land. Because the rains didn't come there was no barley harvest. Remember what God said in the previous verse? Though there was no food, you never go hungry for me. Now look at what God says.

<sup>8</sup>People would stagger from village to village, crazed for water and never quenching their thirst. But you never got thirsty for me. You ignored me."

This is repeated. You ignored me. You ignored me. You ignored me.

Blight on the crops is the next one.

I hit your crops with disease and withered your orchards and gardens. Locusts devoured your olive and fig trees, but you continued to ignore me."

Then he moves from environmental and natural disasters to speaking about war and disease. Look at verse 10 and 11

<sup>10</sup>"I revisited you with the old Egyptian plagues, killed your choice young men and prize horses. The stink of rot in your camps was so strong that you held your noses-- But you didn't notice me. You continued to ignore me."

<sup>11</sup>"I hit you with earthquake and fire, left you devastated like Sodom and Gomorrah. You were like a burning stick snatched from the flames. But you never looked my way. You continued to ignore me."

Do you see what this says? God was saying through Amos that all around I gave you signs of your need for me, but you continued to ignore me. If you continue to ignore me the day will come when fish hooks will be put through your noses and you will be taken away to Assyria.

I will come back to verse 12-13 in a minute. Let's try and apply this a bit.

I believe that what we are hearing from environmentalists is true. There are changes that are happening that we need to hear about this and take heed of what is being said.

With the HIV/AIDS crisis in Africa we need to find ways to work with people so that those of us in the affluent west can help those most in need. We need to hear that message

But what is lacking in all of this debate and call is the very thing that Amos says here. You are facing environmental disaster and various diseases. But in the midst of it all you are forgetting me.

God is placing on my heart a deeper desire to know and understand what is happening in Africa. Next summer I hope to go to Kenya for the month of June. One of the things that I think God wants to show the world through Africa is they are at the point where they are listening to God in a way that we in the West are not.

Let me tell you about Uganda. It is New years Eve 2000. The city is Kampala and the venue is the main soccer stadium. The arena is full and the person who is leading this particular rally is the wife of the Uganda president. They want to begin the new millenium by turning back to God. The reason for this gathering is Kampala is so that they could declare their desire to turn away from wickedness and back to the Lord. It's was the President's wife who is leading this gathering.

Uganda has recognized their need for God.

Do you know that Uganda is the only country in Africa that is beginning to get a handle on HIV/AIDS? In 1990 the statistics were showing that 30% of the population was infected with the HIV/AIDS virus. For example a woman would go to an antenatal clinic or a man would go to a STD clinic. 30% of those tested were carrying the virus. In 2004 those numbers have dropped down to somewhere between 14% and 4.6 %.

In Uganda they preach ABC. Abstain from sexual activity outside of marriage. B is be faithful to one partner in marriage and C is use a condom if you cannot practice A or B. They have preached this starting with the President in 1986.

God is showing us I believe as Anglican Christians that we have to pay attention of Africa and especially to countries like Uganda. The African voice is I think a prophetic voice. The African voice is a voice through which God is saying pay attention to me I am speaking to you. You in the Anglican Church of Canada are so much like the people to whom Amos was speaking. If you continue to go in the

direction you are heading you will end up desolate and spiritually bankrupt.

Like the people gathering at Bethel and Gilgal we can offer worship to God that we think is pleasing to him and beautiful to share in, but so much of it is nothing more than a religious show. I hear God saying to my heart and our collective that such worship does not please him.

Look at how the passage ends.

<sup>12</sup>"All this I have done to you, Israel, and this is why I have done it. Time's up, O Israel! Prepare to meet your God!"

Of course there is the ultimate preparation. We are all going to die one day. I am going to die one day. It does say in the New Testament that those who are teachers in the church will be judged more strictly by God. I take that very seriously. I will one day meet God and he will ask have you been faithful? Did you try to preach my word to my people.

I am sure there are places in my life where God will show how I have been unfaithful and he will point these out to me in his merciful love. I want to stand before God and say Lord I have tried to be faithful. Forgive me for the times I was not a thank you for all the ways your Spirit moved in my life to help me to become more faithful.

Are you growing in faithfulness? God desires this for you.

God is saying to us

<sup>13</sup>Look who's here: Mountain-Shaper! Wind-Maker! He laid out the whole plot before Adam. He brings everything out of nothing, like dawn out of darkness. He strides across the alpine ridges. His name is GOD, God-of-the-Angel-Armies.

We in Alberta know what this is all about. We have God's creative work in our faces every day. We live in a place where the environment is governed by the one who is the mountain shaper and wind maker.

For not only is he the mountain shaper and the wind-maker he is also the one who "reveals his thoughts to mortals"

The one who is the mountain shaper and wind maker is the one who is speaking to us through his word and each other as well. More and more the Spirit is giving rise to a prophetic voice within our congregation for which we praise him. May we be attentive to what he is saying as he reveals more of his will and shows us more about the state of our souls.

Although this is a hard passage to hear because its message is stern, it is also one that is filled with grace. As these last two verses make so clear “Look around you at the this world. God is speaking. Do you see him and are your listening.”

May God grant to us a willing spirit to both hear and receive his word and so be transformed by its message.