

## **Amos 8**

This is what the Lord God showed me—a basket of summer fruit. He said, ‘Amos, what do you see?’ And 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 pass them by. The songs of the temple shall become wailings on that day,’ says the Lord God; ‘the dead bodies shall be many, cast out in every place. Be silent!’

Hear this, you that trample on the needy, and bring to ruin 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? We will make the ephah small and the shekel great, and practise deceit with false balances, buying the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals, and selling the sweepings of the wheat.’

The Lord has sworn by the pride of Jacob: Surely I will never forget any of their deeds. Shall not the land tremble on this account, and everyone mourn who lives in it, and all of it rise like the Nile, and be tossed about and sink again, like the Nile of Egypt? On that day, says the Lord God, I will make the sun go down at noon, and darken the earth in broad daylight. I will turn your feasts into mourning, and all your songs into lamentation; I will bring sackcloth on all loins, and baldness on every head; I will make it like the mourning for an only son, and the end of it like a bitter day.

The time is surely coming, says the Lord God, when I will send a famine on the land; not a famine of bread, or a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord. They shall wander from sea to sea, and from north to east; they shall run to and fro, seeking the word of the Lord, but they shall not find it. In that day the beautiful young women and the young men shall faint for thirst. Those who swear by Ashimah of Samaria, and say, ‘As your god lives, O Dan’, and, ‘As the way of Beer-sheba lives’— they shall fall, and never rise again.

## **Psalms 52**

To the leader. A Maskil of David, when Doeg the Edomite came to Saul and said to him, ‘David has come to the house of Ahimelech.’ Why do you boast, O mighty one, of mischief done against the godly? All day long you are plotting destruction. Your tongue is like a sharp razor, you worker of treachery. You love evil more than good, and lying more than speaking the truth. Selah

You love all words that devour, O deceitful tongue. But God will break you down for ever; he will snatch and tear you from your tent; he will uproot you from the land of the living. Selah

The righteous will see, and fear, and will laugh at the evildoer, saying, ‘See the one who would not take refuge in God, but trusted in abundant riches, and sought refuge in wealth!’

But I am like a green olive tree in the house of God. I trust in the steadfast love of God for ever and ever. I will thank you for ever, because of what you have done. In the presence of the faithful I will proclaim your name, for it is good.

**“On Being a Cool Cat in the Dog Days of Summer”**

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Kathy Sabin said it. She said, "Nothing much we can do about the heat wave that's on us. Another dry, hot day, mostly sunny skies, afternoon temperatures in triple digits. A hundred degrees today. Maybe a little rain. 97 tomorrow, 97 Monday, 95 Tuesday, 96 Wednesday, 94 Thursday, 92 Friday, 91 Saturday..." The dog days of summer. Dog days. Stars at night, in some people's minds, made the shape of a dog this time of year. Some of the stars, this time of year, so bright. They used to think the stars were so bright they gave heat to the earth, because it was hot. Fourth of July, through September, dog days of summer. Sidewalks buckle, streets melt, the pace is slowed. It's hot, the steering wheel burns your hands when you hold on tight. Sunglasses sizzle on the bridge of your nose when you put them on to block the rays. The ice cream drips off the cone. The green grass turns brown except for the weeds. Crickets rub two legs together, the frogs burp in the stagnant water. Only morticians and senior pastors wear neckties, and they stretch around the collar of the shirt like a noose with a hangman's knot. The dog days of summer. Let's go to the beach. Meet you at Horsetooth, and we'll sit in the water and soak and sweat till we glisten and drip. Heat wave is on us, in the dog days of summer. A time to take time, a time to think.

Yogi Berra once bought a white suit. White coat, white slacks, white shirt, white shoes, white necktie. George Steinbrenner saw him in his new suit and said to him, "Yogi, you look real cool in your new white suit," and Yogi said, "You don't look so hot yourself." The prophet Amos looked at the people, it was the dog days of summer, and he thought, they don't look so hot, and they don't look cool. He said, "The Lord God has shown me a basket of summer fruit. It was over-ripe, rotten, it was the heat of the summer. It reminded him of his people, and it reminded him of how people crush the poor, about how they put dust on the scales and then sell it for good, and the sun will go down at noon and the day will turn to darkness and beautiful women and wonderful men will faint and fall down and will they ever get up?"

It makes us ponder. What now do we have, in the dog days of summer? Young men die of a terrible unpredictable illness. Young women kill when a truck drives through an eye clinic. A platform blows up and oil squirts all over the water, and fish and shrimp and clams and the shoreline is covered with tarballs and goo. Politicians make promises they know they can't keep. Some of them have plagiarized and they had to confess it. Where are the honest folks in the dog days of summer? What now? What now, it's so hot?

Yogi Berra, when he was in high school, got an F on a test, and his teacher gave the test back to him and said, "Mr. Berra, don't you know anything?" And he looked at her and said, "I don't even suspect anything." Well, people of faith may not know, but we do suspect, and the dog days of summer we suspect when faced with "What now?" we will survive it. Because there is a God, and we will find our light. James Michener in his book *Chesapeake* talks about the native Americans and the Maryland shore area. They thought God gave them the bay for transportation and for fish, and God gave them the reeds for

their houses, and God gave them crabs for food, and God gave them mosquitoes to show them that God could do whatever God wants.

Someone once said, "My friends don't believe I could be a public speaker, so I did something about it. I got new friends." And sometimes that's what you've got to do, because there is a touch of the eternal in us. "What now?" yields the God to us, the sentence of the heat that's on us. We find our light. We find our light when the world gives us "What now?" it's time to find our light. When the dog days of summer come to us, and we find the God light and the confidence within us. "What now?" "So now?" Who are we now?

When I was in fifth grade, I took up playing the trombone, and at the end of the school year they put on this concert in front of the assembly, all the students at second ward school and our parents, and I played the Mariner's Hymn. I played it with music in front of me, and somewhere between the halls of Montezuma and the shores of Tripoli I got lost, and I had to start over. I finished that thing after my third try. A fourth grader, David Ornick, stood up when I finished, with his little trumpet, and without any sheet music, he played the Mariner's Hymn straight through. And after the concert he was strutting around like the little peacock he was, and I beat him up, right there in the band room in front of Mr. Pickard the band director, and they took my trombone away. But I haven't quit. I found the light, maybe.

At the CSU spring concert I went against my will. Eight trombone players stood up and played, and I said to myself, "I could do that." Maybe we could line up the trombone troubadours in the church in a row, and do that trombone suicide thing they do at CSU at the band, you know, some of them doing this and some of them doing that, all of them synchronized, it would be a beautiful thing. All the time playing "Nearer My God to Thee."

I spoke to my stepfather about this, since he was a professor and a musician. You now, he just died. This was the last conversation we had. I told him I was learning to play the trombone and a church member was teaching me, and loaned me one of his old trombones, and Clyde said he thought that was a good thing. He did say he thought the trombone was a vile instrument. He even referred to it as a weapon. He asked if I'd be playing the trombone in church, and suggested that I might want to do that the last Sunday I'm here.

In the dog days of life, when the sun shines bright, we've got to find our light. If they put us down we've got to stand back up. If things go wrong, then we find a way to make things right, the best we can. If it's one thing after another thing to the point, "What now?" then we lean into it and we get strong because of it. Paul said it in Ephesians, he said, "Let no one deceive you with empty words. Once you were in darkness, but now you're in the Lord and you're in the light and you are the light. Live as children of the light." And then he said, "Sleepers awake, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine in you." The way George Carl has, coach of the Nuggets, got an award. I thought a fitting contrast with the narcissistic bombastic antics of LeBron James and Duane Wade and

Chris Bosch, who turned defection and disloyalty into a media event, and joined the Miami Heat basketball team. They deserve each other. They are not cool cats in the dog days of summer, to me. But George Carl is an interesting fellow. He's got cancer you know, he played basketball at the University of North Carolina. They called him Furious George. There's fire in his belly. He is competitive and he views his job as coach the way he played the game, and has discovered something important in this time of illness and treatment. He's lost his voice almost, he's very weak when he speaks, and very thin. But they gave him an award for perseverance, and he said, "I sat in the room with five other people going through radiation and chemotherapy. Their spirit and competitive drive is at least as much as mine, and maybe more. Their enemy is cancer. My enemy is the Lakers. There's this one guy who gets radiation treatments before me, and it hit him pretty hard. But he'd come in with a joke one day, then he'd come in with a story the next day, and he cheered up everyone. He said, "I'm a competitor, but I've learned there are thousands of competitors out there who have this inner strength and will power, and I admire them, because they found the light in the dog days of summer." When we wonder about "What now?" A basket of rotten summer fruit. We find the strength to bear it and the fire to face it and the determination to overcome it.

C. C. Scott said, "The human spirit is stronger than anything that can happen to it." And there's an old proverb that said, "Turn your face to the sun and the shadows fall behind you." And they will be in the light when the sun shines bright. Bask in the light. What now? First the spark, ignite the spirit, light the light of Christ. The touch of the Eternal. What now? We find our light. Confidence now. God now, that's what. In the dog days of summer. But what next? What now, what next? If it's hot hot hot, and it will be, the heat wave, we feel the heat, in the dog days of summer we find a way somehow to beat the heat. The present circumstance must not rob us of future anticipation. We find a way to beat the heat. We look beyond us and we look ahead. There is no part of the Christian story that does not include hope, because there is no part of the Christian God that does not include grace. The Psalmist knew it. God can be trusted day after day. We can count on God's love forever, and we know it today, and we will know it and have it tomorrow.

I don't know anyplace more difficult in the dog days of summer than the post office, waiting to pick up your mail after being out of town. I mean, the lines are long, the clerks are slow, my apologies to any of you who work there, but you might speed it up a little bit. And the heat is on. Someone in line, paying a bill, sending it by mail, having to buy a stamp, that's why they're there, thirty minutes and the line hasn't moved, waiting, writing a check, not sure of the date, asks the person in front of them "Excuse me, could you tell me what day it is?" She looked at him and said, "It's the 16<sup>th</sup> of July." Starts to write that on the check, when the man behind him warns, "I'm really not sure you ought to put the date on that yet."

We feel the heat and wonder about the present time and its future, and find a way to beat the heat. We trust the future to come. Gutzon Borglum, sculptor, created the Mount Rushmore memorial, was asked if he considered his work perfect and he said, "Not today. No, the nose of Washington is an inch too long. But it's better that way. It will

erode and be exactly right in 10,000 years." We feel the heat. We think ahead. It was Martin Luther King who said, "We must accept finite disappointment, but never lose infinite hope." We look ahead. We feel the heat, and find ways to beat it. I don't know if it's true, but I know it's truth.

Nikita Krushchev, premier of the Soviet Union, ended his political life in disgrace. I've been reading William Taubman's book *Krushchev: The Man and His Era*. Taubman recalls how Krushchev, some of you remember, when he took off his shoe at the United Nations and pounded it on the desk, you remember that? Well, the people in his home town in his province, Georgia, in the Soviet Union, were very proud of that, because many of them didn't have shoes. And when Krushchev took off his shoe and pounded it on the desk, they said, "Ah, our man has a shoe!" But the officials, the Soviet officials, were terribly embarrassed by what he had done. Krushchev was then pulled off and sent into exile and he died several years later. There's a story, it may or may not be true, I don't know. But after Krushchev died, the Soviet leaders didn't want to have him buried in Russia so they called Golda Meir, prime minister of Israel, asking if he could be buried in Jerusalem. And Mrs. Meir answered, according to the rumor, again, I don't know if this is true, "We could do that, but I must warn you, this country has the world's highest resurrection rate." I don't know if it's true, but I do know Krushchev is not buried in Israel.

And I think all of us know the working implications of the idea of resurrection upon us. It is a clear message when we feel the heat we face the future when things are tough we can trust the future. Today we look to tomorrow, that's how we beat the heat in the dog days of summer, because we can survive and maybe even thrive, when we can trust what's next to be better than what's been. Life teaches us faith is right. What next, when we feel the heat.

Last Sunday they went over to start up the church van to pick up our people and bring them to church, and the driver got a surprise. There were hornets in the van, and one of our people got stung. So we got cars and brought folks to church that way. What next? That old van is slowing down, the air conditioning doesn't work, we can't drive it today, now they got hornets, one person got stung. I went over Sunday night and attacked the hornets with something called Raid, and I just shot them out of the air in the name of Jesus. There was a nest in the door of that van, on the driver's side. What next? There was another nest on the passenger side door. Last Sunday the van could not bring people to church. What next?

Monday afternoon, Columbine let us know they're giving us one of theirs. Wow. What next? We beat the heat, we look ahead. About a month ago the church was invited to go to the garden at Spring Creek. Would anybody come, we wondered? And what would we do when we got there? Well, the first thing we noticed, that night it was hot. It was really hot, it was 96 degrees hot. What next? The second thing we noticed after we got there was, a hawk caught a snake and ate it right in front of us. What next? We had over fifty people. Fifty-four, fifty-five people, and the people we had invited to speak, and then all of us were invited to share, a scientist who said he saw beauty in the garden and science in religion is not adversarial, and a woman who knew about bees, a beekeeper, said the

bees remind her to slow down. And a man who cannot see heard the sounds in the garden, he heard a child pumping water from a pump and he described the smells of the garden, and he felt the breeze of the garden. And we had a philosopher who reminded us how all life ties together into a flow, and God is in the midst of the flow. And a songwriter who said, "I see diversity. Look at all these flowers, and look at all the diversity in the faces."

It was a beautiful thing. But each of the speakers as they stood up to speak said, "I don't know why the pastor has invited us here, I don't know what he expected..." I don't know what I expected. Why did we go to the garden on that hot evening? We felt the heat but we didn't know what next. But what we will remember about the event, what we will remember about that experience, was the pulse of life and the friendship of nature and what we will remember is how God was in the garden, and what we were saying to each other when it was over and have continued to say to each other, "We need to do more things like this." What we remember about is not the heat of the night, that hasn't even been brought up, it's been defeated because we're looking at what we have and we're looking at what next. We experience God. You know, you never know what's going to happen.

Two boys got into a dispute at home. Matthew was eight and Jeremy was six. It was over a piece of cake, obviously the last piece of cake. Their father decided to solve it theologically, and so he asked the older son Matthew, he said, "What do you think Jesus would do?" The standard Christian response, Matthew would have said, "Jesus would say Here Jeremy, you can have it." The joke we preachers tell is having Matthew suggest, "Well, Jesus would say, 'Here Jeremy, you can have it.' Okay today Jeremy, you be Jesus and I'll take it."

What Ken Erickson's oldest son did say, however, Matthew looked at his father and his brother and he said, "You know what Jesus would do in this situation, Dad? He'd make another cake." Always there is more than we see. Always there's something better. Always there is trust. When there is pain, we dare to thrive. And eventually overcome, like George Carl. When we are discouraged, we live through it to joy. When there is grief, there is blessedness that comes in mourning. And when there is death there's resurrection. When the day is dark, there's another day coming. What next? When we feel the heat, what next is God. And with God there's trust, and we can trust the future when we feel the heat.

William James said it, quoted in Rabbi Kushner's book, the one we're studying, *Concrete Fear*. These are my last words to you. Be not afraid of life, believe that life is worth living and your belief will help you create the fact." Kathy Sabin warns us the heat wave has arrived, high pressure selves, hot days, sunny skies, temperatures will triple and nothing you can do about it. Double digit, triple-digit temperatures, life gives us "What now?" and we find our light and we survive, and life gives us what next, and we beat the heat and we look ahead and we thrive. We find our light, we beat the heat, with faith, and hope, like we always have. So there is something we can do about the heat wave when it

comes, as it has, because we know there's a cool front on the way, that's already here,  
because we are cool cats in the dog days of summer.