

The Day
32nd Sunday of Ordinary Time
November 8, 2020
Trinity Bixby
Rev. Lucus Levy Keppel

[Amos 5:18-24](#) (NLT)
[I Thess. 4:13-18](#)

When does a day begin? If you ask most any American how they spent their day, nearly everyone would say (in their own words), “First, I woke up and got ready to face the day...” It’s so ingrained in us that Day begins with Morning. Sure, the date rolls over at midnight – and we have this weird fixation with noon, as we transition from ante meridiem (before midday) to post meridiem (after midday) – but yeah, day, for us, nearly always begins in the morning.

For the ancient Hebrews, though, Day did not begin with morning. You counted days from sundown to sunset, and so the first thing that happened nearly every day wasn’t “waking up” – but gathering with family and eating a meal of bread, stewed lentils and veggies, and maybe a bit of dates and honey, giving thanks to God for the sustaining food and sweetness of fruit. Then, after the evening meal, men would often gather to discuss Scripture and argue theology, before turning in for the night.¹

After sleeping the night, the day continued with an early morning – rising before the sun, alternating between grinding flour and baking fresh bread in the kitchen, and there were nearly always some sheep or goats to care for, too. Breakfast would likely be some lentils or chickpeas left soaking through the night and pieces of broken bread with olive oil. During the day, people primarily worked in the fields – men, women, and children together, doing the hard work to raise crops in rocky soil, clearing land to terrace fields, and, if necessary, hiring out your labor to others. Work ceased in the middle of the day, as people returned home to have a large meal together, before going back to their respective tasks, until the sun

¹ Unfortunately, we don’t have a lot of information on the evening activities of women and children, as almost all of our sources were written by men.

set and one day ended as another began. It was a lot of hard work, day in and day out, and so most looked forward to the joy of a sabbath day – a time when work was forbidden, and everyone could enjoy the time together. Festival days gave a break from the monotony, too, a chance to travel, to gather with others, and worship as part of the larger community.

This is all idealized, of course – there were days of hardship, of war, of crop failures, and so on – but it helps us to understand the rhythms of life, so that we can understand how people would have come to listen to prophets in the city gates, and pass on their words to others. By the time of the prophet Amos, the united kingdom of Israel had splintered into two parts – the northern Kingdom, which kept the name Israel, and the southern Kingdom, which took the name Judah. Amos began as a herdsman from Judah, before hearing a call from God that caused him to leave his life and travel up to Israel. We gloss over this a lot, so let me give an analogy: If you picture Oklahoma as Israel, then Amos would have been from Texas. Sure, people from both understand each other to a great extent, but there's also a bit of animosity, of rivalry, baked in too. And what does Amos do? He starts doomsaying, preaching about the Day of the Lord.

“The day of the Lord will be dark and hopeless, without a ray of joy or hope!” he cries. “What sorrow awaits you who say, if only the day of the Lord were here!” How does it feel to hear these words? Even for us, so far removed from Amos' time, these words hurt. Israel, at that time, was in grave danger. Their kings were not following God's way – instead, marrying for alliances and then turning to idolatry and often breaking their alliances anyway. They had angered both Egypt and Assyria, the two big powers that coveted the land of Israel, and did not have support from others, including Judah. Yet, at the same time, while alienating their allies, Israel's kings were also systematically oppressing their own people, taking bribes in judicial cases, and appointing their friends and relatives to positions of power rather than by whether they could handle the task. When things looked their bleakest, the Kings would just remind the people that “The Day of the Lord” will come, and the foreign invaders would be judged and destroyed. They held great

religious festivals, ostensibly honoring and worshipping God, but turning in private away from God's righteousness, of protection for outsiders, for the widow, the stranger, the orphan, and the poor.

Through Amos, God spoke harsh words of condemnation:

I hate all your show and pretense – the hypocrisy of your religious festivals and solemn assemblies. I will not accept your... offerings. Away with your noisy hymns of praise! I will not listen to the music of your harps. Instead, I want to see a mighty flood of justice, an endless river of righteous living. (Amos 5:21-24)

God turns away from worship given in hypocrisy. It is not the precise words that God wants, but justice, righteous living. God wants us to walk the walk. Amos reminds the people that, if the Day of the Lord happened now, it would begin as all days did – in darkness. As the first chapter of Genesis says, "It was evening. It was morning. The first day."

After the sun goes down, there is sleep. And after sleeping, awakening to see light once again. In addition to being literal, this was a common euphemism in the ancient world to refer to those who had died. Indeed, the literal reading of I Thessalonians 4:13 is, "We want you to know about people who have fallen asleep, so that you won't mourn like other others who have no hope." Paul uses the literal word for death in the next line: "Since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep." He compares, again and again, our mortal death with the experience of falling asleep – and waking in the morning with Jesus' rise from the dead. The details of a "shout" and a "blast of the trumpet" heralding the return – this is how soldiers are awakened from sleep. Paul is comforting the church in Thessaloniki by saying, whether you are living or dead, we will be together with God at the end. While we mourn those that have "fallen asleep," we have faith in the rising of the Son of God – just like we, in the morning of the day have faith in the rising of the sun in the sky. Days that begin in darkness do not end there – but continue in the light, in the righteousness of God.

So let us have hope, my friends. The darkest hours of our life, before we fall

asleep, will be turned to daylight at the coming of Christ. We call not on the Day of the Lord to save us – but instead, proceed to act with justice and righteousness in our lives as best we can, knowing that what we do now matters, and that, ultimately, we will always be with God.

Amen.