

This is a sermon about locusts. Now just the mention of locusts brings to mind Mr. Locust himself, John the Baptist. Can you imagine *eating* locusts? A few years ago, a man from the suburb of Bloomington did. He made national news by eating thirty of them. The man ended up in the hospital with a rash all over his body. Pastors may call that “the theology of the cross.” Lay people call that “just plain dumb.”

Locusts may not be our insect of choice, but they certainly were in the Old Testament. Israelites were so familiar with locusts that they coined nine different Hebrew words to describe these purveyors of powerful plagues. Sometimes there can be as many as 120 million critters in one square mile of locusts. One swarm that crossed the Red Sea in 1899 covered an area of over 1,900 square miles!

And boy oh boy, do locusts love to eat! In fact, they can eat their own body weight each day. Just imagine eating your own body weight each day! Uh, on second thought, don't imagine eating your own body weight each day.

Amos, who grew sycamore trees and harvested their fruit (Amos 7:14), knew all about the deadly destruction of locusts. The prophet describes one in Amos 7:1–3. The timing of the plague is critical. This is why Amos gives us two chronological markers in verse 1. If a locust plague attacked in the late spring, the results were catastrophic. They destroyed both the late-spring crops as well as the more developed, and as yet unharvested, *earlier* grain crop. If the locusts had arrived earlier, the late-spring crops would not have sprouted. If they had come later, the grain was already gathered. So the locusts arrived not only when they could maximize their destruction, but adding insult to injury, also after the king had taken his lawful part of the harvest remnant. As it stands, Amos is seeing the worst possible agricultural enemy come at the worst possible time. The result is certain. If not halted immediately, the people would have to face the worse possible hardship, an entire *year* of famine.

The first judgment of locusts came when God inflicted them upon Egypt (Exodus 10:1–19). What does this mean? It means that Israel is now in the same place as their ancient enemy, Egypt. Why is this the case? Because upper class Israelites were enslaving lower class Israelites by withholding justice in the courts (Amos 5:12), ignoring their cries for food and water (6:6), and by employing dishonest business practices (8:4–6). The “haves” were abusing the “have-nots” and in doing so they were doing more than just making a living. They were making a killing. So, the nation fell under this covenant curse: “You shall carry

much seed into the field and shall gather in little, for the locust shall consume it" (Deut. 28:38).

In Revelation 9 John uses the imagery of locusts to remind us of our enemy, who also comes to kill, steal, and destroy. John looks at this vast army and describes them with these graphic terms: "Their teeth are like lions' teeth. They have iron breastplates . . . they have tails and stings like scorpions . . . and they have as king over them the angel of the Abyss, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek, Apollyon."

Abaddon and Apollyon both mean "**Destroyer**." Later in Revelation 12 and then again in chapter 20 John calls this Destroyer, "the ancient serpent who is the devil and Satan." Satan's demons seek to devour everything in us that is spiritually alive. Their strategy is clear: "We will chew you up and spit you out!"

The devil's lies strip away baptismal promises, eucharistic joy, and Gospel power. His temptations destroy marital fidelity, moral responsibility, and churchly civility. The devil's swarms lead us to whisper wicked words, lunge for lustful looks, hate with hard hearts, and go on in godless gossip.

Who can stop this onslaught of the locusts?

Little Rachel was at her first wedding and watched the ceremony with great interest. When it was over, she asked her mother, "Why did the lady change her mind?" Her mother asked, "What do you mean?" "Well, she went down the aisle with one man, and came back with another one." Changing our mind is not always a bad thing. God changes His mind, too, and in the case of the locusts, it was for the better.

Amos intercedes for Israel, and God relents. The Lord changes from wrath to mercy, from Law to Gospel. And we call this change amazing grace!

Jesus is the greatest intercessor and insister in the Bible. He continually intercedes for sinners (Is. 53:12; Rom. 8:34). In fact, one of our Lord's chief functions as High Priest is to make intercession for His people (Heb. 7:25). Luke 23:34 records Jesus' prayer for the Roman soldiers crucifying Him: "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." The verb in this verse indicates that, far from saying this just once, our Savior repeatedly asked His Father to have mercy on those who killed Him. Jesus said this outside of Jerusalem at a place called Golgotha where the Romans bent and broke and maimed and mauled their victims. And then they systematically threw them away. There "the angel of the Abyss, Abaddon and Apollyon" stalked Jesus, took aim, shot straight, and killed.

But Christ is alive! And this means that the Destroyer will one day be destroyed, and the Devourer will soon be devoured. John encourages us with these words: “And the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever” (Revelation 20:10).

There are some years in South Africa when locusts swarm the land and eat all the crops. They come in hordes so thick that the sun is completely blocked out. The crops are destroyed, and an impoverished winter follows. The years of the locust are feared and dreaded. The year that follows, however, is a year of plentiful abundance! The dead bodies of the previous year’s locusts serve as fertilizer for the new seeds, and the crops swell from the land.

In life, there are seasons of deep distress and afflictions that eat away the baptismal abundance that is ours in Christ. Yet the promise of God is that in Jesus Christ He will restore the years that the locusts have eaten (Joel 2:25).

Look out locusts, here we come! Amen.