

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost

Occasion: Proper 13

Sunday, August 4, 2019

Year (cycle): C

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The Collect:

Let your continual mercy, O Lord, cleanse and defend your Church; and, because it cannot continue in safety without your help, protect and govern it always by your goodness; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Reading 1

Old Testament:

Hosea 11: 1-11

- 1 When Israel was a child, I loved him,
and out of Egypt I called my son.
- 2 The more I called them,
the more they went from me;
they kept sacrificing to the Baals,
and offering incense to idols.
- 3 Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk,
I took them up in my arms;
but they did not know that I healed them.
- 4 I led them with cords of human kindness,
with bands of love.
I was to them like those
who lift infants to their cheeks.
I bent down to them and fed them.
- 5 They shall return to the land of Egypt,
and Assyria shall be their king,
because they have refused to return to me.
- 6 The sword rages in their cities,

it consumes their oracle-priests,
and devours because of their schemes.

7 My people are bent on turning away from me.
To the Most High they call,
but he does not raise them up at all.

8 How can I give you up, Ephraim?
How can I hand you over, O Israel?
How can I make you like Admah?
How can I treat you like Zeboiim?
My heart recoils within me;
my compassion grows warm and tender.

9 I will not execute my fierce anger;
I will not again destroy Ephraim;
for I am God and no mortal,
the Holy One in your midst,
and I will not come in wrath.

10 They shall go after the Lord,
who roars like a lion;
when he roars,
his children shall come trembling from the west.

11 They shall come trembling like birds from Egypt,
and like doves from the land of Assyria;
and I will return them to their homes, says the Lord.

Book Summary

Passage Summary

Hosea was a native of the northern kingdom, Israel. He prophesied during the decades before the kingdom was conquered by the Assyrians (in 721BC). It was a time of warfare and near anarchy. Four kings of Israel were assassinated within 14 years. Hosea's marriage to a prostitute symbolizes Israel's relationship to God. The people of Israel have become unfaithful to their covenant with God. Hosea's wife leaves him after bearing him three children. But Hosea takes her back publicly - something unheard of in Israelite culture. His personal life is an embodiment of God's redeeming love. God will have compassion on Israel; he will not desert his people.

Hosea 11: 1-11

In the first three chapters of the book, Hosea uses symbolism to tell of the deviation of the people of the northern kingdom (Israel) from God's ways: they have deserted God and their covenant with him. Much of the rest of the book warns of the consequences they will suffer for their waywardness. They have insisted on worshipping pagan gods ("kept sacrificing to the Baals", v. [2](#)). (Baal was a god in the religions of both Canaan and Tyre.) Of all the books of the Bible, Hosea has suffered most in transmission down to us, so the meaning of some phrases remains obscure, in spite of the efforts of scholars to understand them.

God, through Hosea, recalls the Exodus from Egypt (vv. [1-4](#)). He compares God's loving leadership of the Israelites with a parent nurturing a child. Off worshipping other gods, they are unaware that God cared for them, healed them, and fed them. (A wise man was often called *father* by his students; in this sense, Israel is God's "son", v. [1](#). "Ephraim", v. [3](#), means *Israel*: this tribal territory was a particularly important part of the north.) Vv. [5-7](#) tell of the punishment: the people will be exiled to "Assyria"; not having returned to God, they will be in bondage, as they were in "Egypt". There will be fighting "in their cities" (v. [6](#)); their priests will be killed. Even though they will call upon God for help, he will not hear them (v. [7](#)). Vv. [8-9](#) are in a different tone. God speaks in a human, emotional way, but his anger (unlike human anger) does not last; he will again be compassionate. He will not cause the utter destruction of the cities and their inhabitants. ("Admah" and "Zeboiim" were destroyed with Sodom and Gomorrah.) The people will return from exile to the land, "to their homes" (v. [11](#)).

Reflection:

Meditating on this passage of prophetic imagining surfaces the tension that characterizes the relationship between God and Israel. Both parties bend their backs, but God's bending nourishes while the peoples' bending isolates them from infinite sustenance. The poet paints a picture of YHWH —the God of their ancestors—who calls out to them time and again only to be cast aside. The more God called out, the further the people ran outside of earshot. In the poet's hands, God reminisces about teaching the people how to walk, embracing them with open arms, and healing them when healing was needed. God says, "I led them with cords of human kindness, with bands of love" (v. 4), but perhaps the people mistook the cords and bands as tools of bondage rather than connectors of infinite mercy. In verses five through seven, it seems that the Assyrian conquest vindicates God's anger, tempting God to turn a blind eye when the people finally wave their arms in distress and return God's call.

But this is a God who desires closeness. And perhaps the poet even endeavors to imagine YHWH, the great I AM, into a space of introspection. The poet's words seem to push the creator of all things to say, "For I am God and no mortal, the Holy One in your midst" (v. 9) – a reminder to the Holy One of his abundant capacity not only for anger and wrath but also for intimate knowing and loving. In verse eight, the poet writes that God's heart recoils within God, as if it had been previously wretched out by Israel's rejection. Instead of burning with wrath outside of the chest, God's heart recoils and grows warm and tender with compassion close to Godself. The writer suggests that YHWH can no more exist without the love and affection of humans than a fish can live outside of water.

- What causes us to bend away from God?
- How might we straighten our backs to meet God?

Reading 2

Psalm 107: 1-9, 43

1 Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, *
and his mercy endures for ever.

2 Let all those whom the Lord has redeemed proclaim *

that he redeemed them from the hand of the foe.

3 He gathered them out of the lands; *
from the east and from the west,
from the north and from the south.

4 Some wandered in desert wastes; *
they found no way to a city where they might dwell.

5 They were hungry and thirsty; *
their spirits languished within them.

6 Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, *
and he delivered them from their distress.

7 He put their feet on a straight path *
to go to a city where they might dwell.

8 Let them give thanks to the Lord for his mercy *
and the wonders he does for his children.

9 For he satisfies the thirsty *
and fills the hungry with good things.

43 Whoever is wise will ponder these things, *
and consider well the mercies of the Lord.

Book Summary	Passage Summary
<p>Psalms Psalms is a collection of collections. The psalms were written over many centuries, stretching from the days of Solomon's temple (about 950 BC) to after the Exile (about 350 BC.) Psalms are of five types: hymns of praise, laments, thanksgiving psalms, royal psalms, and wisdom psalms. Within the book, there are five "books"; there is a doxology ("Blessed be ... Amen and Amen") at the end of each book.</p>	<p>Psalm 107: 1-9, 43 As it now exists, this psalm is a group thanksgiving, perhaps sung by pilgrims travelling to Jerusalem to celebrate a festival. They thank God for escape from various dangers. There are two refrains: here vv. <u>6</u> and <u>8</u>. V. <u>1</u> is a summons to praise. The themes of <i>redemption</i> and <i>gathering</i> suggest that vv. <u>2-3</u> were written after the Exile; they may have been added (with vv. <u>33-43</u>) to change the psalm from an individual thanksgiving to one suited to communal use. V. <u>3</u> pictures the people as coming from all points of the compass, although most came from the east (Babylon). Vv. <u>4-9</u> tell of the Israelites wandering in the desert during the Exodus. When they were “hungry and thirsty” (v. <u>5</u>), physically and spiritually, God came to their aid. The next four stanzas also tell of God’s help to them in troubled times; the pilgrims thank him for his fidelity to the covenant he made at Sinai. Vv. <u>33-43</u> are part of a hymn praising God for his bounty. May people who know God, (“wise”, v. <u>43</u>) people, recall God’s actions on behalf of all his people, his loyalty to the covenant (“steadfast love”).</p>

Reflection:

A great companion to the Hosea passage, this psalm reiterates the steadfastness of God’s love. For the psalmist, God’s love moves beyond words and feelings that make one feel tingly on the inside. God’s grounding and dynamic love shows up to do something. It is the kind of love that moves bodies from one place to another and joins person to person—from the wild desert to an inhabited town. God’s steadfast love is the kind of love

that materializes in the form of food and water when souls are weary. The psalmist reminds us that for those who have wandered beyond the bounds of civilization, finding themselves stranded from all that they know, God's love follows them with unceasing tenacity.

- Can you name your last desert dwelling? What led you there and how did you get out? If you are still in your desert moment, what effect does this psalm have on you?
- What are the "food" and "water" in your life that God has provided for you?

Reading 3

Epistle:

Colossians 3: 1-11

1 So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, 3for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4When Christ who is your* life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory.

5 Put to death, therefore, whatever in you is earthly: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed (which is idolatry). 6On account of these the wrath of God is coming on those who are disobedient. 7These are the ways you also once followed, when you were living that life. 8But now you must get rid of all such things—anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive language from your mouth. 9Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have stripped off the old self with its practices 10and have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator. 11In that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all!

Book Summary

Passage Summary

Colossae was a city in what is now southwestern Turkey. It had a flourishing wool and textile industry and a significant Jewish population. It seems that most Christians there were Gentile. Although long thought to be written by Paul, today this epistle is considered non-Pauline for a number of reasons. The most compelling is that it emphasizes what God has already done for his people: Paul tells us what God is going to do in the future (although some argue that Paul shifted his viewpoint in later life.) It gives descriptions of false teachings which were being promulgated in the churches. Some scholars consider this evidence of later authorship. In the ancient world, writing in the name of a respected author was accepted and regarded as an honour.

Colossians 3: 1-11

The author has described baptism as being raised with Christ and becoming sharers in his suffering and death. In the early Church, those to be baptised removed their clothes before the rite and donned new ones after it, symbolizing the casting aside of their old ways and their new life in Christ. Vv. [1-4](#) summarize this teaching. The author tells us that we already have close fellowship with Christ, but that this is not yet fully revealed; our lives are still “hidden with Christ in God” (v. [3](#)). When Christ’s glory is “revealed” (v. [4](#)) at the end of time, our complete union with him will also be seen. (Early Christians saw Psalm [110:1](#), “... Sit at my right hand ...”, see v. [1](#), as showing that Jewish messianic hopes are realized in Christ.) Being baptised, we are expected to conduct ourselves ethically (vv. [5-17](#)): we are to cast aside both sins of the body (v. [5](#)) and of the mind (v. [8](#)). “Fornication” (v. [5](#)), *porneia* in Greek, means *all forms of sexual immorality*; the “impurity” is sexual; “passion” is *lust*; *evil desire* is self-centred covetousness; “greed” motivates a person to set up a god besides God. Because people still commit these sins wilfully and without seeking forgiveness, “the wrath of God is coming” (v. [6](#)) on them – at the end of time. (“Image of its creator”, v. [10](#), recalls that God makes humans in his own image.) In the baptised community, racial and social barriers no longer exist, for “Christ is all and in all” (v. [11](#)).

Reflection:

Should we harbor evil desire and greed within us, or wage anger, malice, and slander toward our neighbor with no regard? Probably not. But by putting to death all of the things earthly and earthy, all of the things that indeed make us human, what do we sacrifice? If we dismiss some earthly passions, do we dismiss all of them – like the need to eat, sleep, create, love, or seek the comfort of others and provide it in return? Focusing on the supposed dualistic hierarchy of spirit over body and heaven over earth creates an either/or situation. Either one can be spiritual and Christ-like, or one can be sinful and earthly, but never both. One is good, the other bad. And yet the joy of Scripture unfolding with revelations from each succeeding generation building upon tradition bids us to explore a variety of interpretations. The writer of Colossians invites listeners to “Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, for you have died” (v. 2). The writer calls the Colossian community to contemplate their life before joining the church, and questions how it might be different now that they have been raised in Christ. What changes will they make in their lives? Membership does not mean paying monetary dues and maintaining the status quo. Once one says yes to following Jesus and living a Christlike existence, the dues one pays are non-material. Sacrifice comes in body and in spirit and welcomes a newly integrated existence dependent upon both. In verses nine and ten, the writer uses the metaphor of being stripped of old garments and “[clothing] yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator” (v. 10), acknowledging the countercultural nature of living according to the image of the creator. The inner transformation manifests outwardly and compels the newly-made person into right relationships with neighbors tempered by understanding, patience, and uplift.

- Colossians makes much ado about remaking the self into the image of Christ. What or who is the image of Christ for you?
- Does it feel burdensome or freeing trying to live this lifestyle?
- In what ways are you being called to live counter-culturally?

Reading 4

Gospel:

Luke 12: 13-21

13 Someone in the crowd said to him, 'Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me.' 14 But he said to him, 'Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?' 15 And he said to them, 'Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.' 16 Then he told them a parable: 'The land of a rich man produced abundantly. 17 And he thought to himself, "What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?" 18 Then he said, "I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. 19 And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry." 20 But God said to him, "You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?" 21 So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich towards God.'

Book Summary

Passage Summary

Three gospels in the New Testament offer similar portraits of the life of Jesus; Luke is the third of them. Its author, traditionally Luke the physician who accompanied Paul on some of his missionary journeys, draws on three sources: Mark (via Matthew), a collection of sayings (known as Q for *Quelle*, German for *source*) and his own source. It is a gospel that emphasizes God's love for the poor, the disadvantaged, minorities, outcasts, sinners and lepers. Women play a more prominent part than in the other gospels. Luke never uses Semitic words; this is one argument for thinking that he wrote primarily for Gentiles.

Luke 12: 13-21

As v. 1 tells us, Jesus has drawn a large crowd; the Parable of the Rich Fool is a lesson for the disciples too (v. 22). As he often does, Jesus speaks to his disciples with others present. The Mishnah, a Jewish book of laws, guided rabbis in how to handle questions of inheritance. (It must have been galling at times that Mosaic law prescribed that an elder son receive twice the inheritance of a younger.) Jesus wants no part in sorting out such issues: the word translated “friend” (v. 14) literally means *human*, a stern salutation. Jesus explains: “all kinds of greed” (v. 15) have no place in anyone’s life; true being (real and meaningful “life”) is more than “possessions”.

Jesus’ story of the farmer is particularly apt for a rural crowd. The farmer’s land “yielded a good harvest” (v. 16, Revised English Bible). As the frequent use of “I” in vv. 17-19 shows, he thinks only of himself, of his material well-being. He fools himself into thinking that materiality satisfies his inner being (“soul”, v. 19). This example story (unusual because God is a character) does not attack wealth *per se*, but rather amassing wealth solely for one’s own enjoyment. Purely selfish accumulation of wealth is incompatible with discipleship. God calls the farmer a “fool” (v. 20) for ignoring his relationship with him. Earthly riches are transient, but a time of reckoning is coming, when we will all be judged by God. This *time* may be when we die or at the end of time, or both. We must trust in God, leaving the future in his hands. Jesus makes his point by providing an absurd example: materialism can get in the way of godliness. (The crowd would recall that, in the Old Testament and in the Apocrypha, foolishness often has overtones of immorality, of deviating from God’s ways.)

Reflection:

In his opening remarks, Jesus proclaims that he will not participate in pronouncing any kind of judgment. Still, he rather sneakily uses the parable, in fact, to pronounce judgment. Jesus seems to say to the young man desperately wishing to draw him into his family quarrel, “You’re paying attention to the wrong things!” In the New Revised Standard Version translation, Jesus sets the scene for his story and tells the crowd to “Take care” (v. 15). The original Greek word for this phrase means see, view, or perceive. He does not tell them to listen up or pay close attention. Instead, Jesus tells them to “perceive,” and then follows with, “Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions” (v. 15). By saying this, Jesus indicates that this goes beyond objective reality or rationalizations of the mind. He wants the young man and the crowd to feel the meaning within their bodies, and to know in a different kind of way.

This does not necessarily seem to be a lesson centered on sharing, but the rich man in the parable uses the word “my” five times in the span of just two verses: “my crops,” “my barns,” “my grain,” “my goods,” “my soul” (v. 17-19). Then, he knocks down his old barn and builds a bigger one to hold his stash. Luke stresses the importance of an equitable society, so the truth to be perceived comes directly from Jesus’ use of the word abundance. With great irony, the rich man capitalizing on his abundance makes him blind to the truth of God’s abundance. The rich man’s greed is built upon his fear of scarcity for his future. Luke drives this point home when God says, “You fool!” (v. 20), echoing Jesus’ opening sentiments to the young man. God seems to say, “Your eyes are so narrowed on your material accumulations, you cannot see the destruction your greed rains upon you or the others around you.”

- How might your perceptions be out of focus with God’s?
- Within your communities, where do you see the fear of scarcity doing harm to others?
- Are there spaces where you can expose the myth of scarcity and introduce the abundance of God?