

Hosea 1:2-10 Children of the Living God
Luke 11:1-13
July 24, 2022

We find Jesus in Luke's gospel, teaching about prayer and giving a version of what has come to be known as The Lord's Prayer. It is a little different from what is found in Matthew's gospel, which is more familiar because it is the version we pray each Sunday morning.

It has sometimes amazed me *how* we pray this prayer and what that says about us. For example, the rendition in Matthew says, "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." But apparently we don't really like debt forgiveness, so we say, "forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us," which is not what the text says.

I have always thought Luke's version could alleviate this tension with, "forgive our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us." And for some reason we need consistency; trespasses and those who trespass against us, debts and debtors, sins and those who sin against us. But what we get in Luke shakes us out of the symmetry of our expectations, "forgive us our sins, as we forgive our debtors." It neither lets us off the hook about our debtors nor allows us to satisfy or need for order.

This is what Hosea does too, it shakes things up, dislodging us from our pre-conceived notions. From week to week I am amazed at how much scripture

does the same thing. Even texts that seem clear, "love your neighbor as yourself," "do unto others as you would have them do unto you," "do not judge," "be kind and compassionate, forgiving each other as in Christ, God has forgiven you," "always pray . . ." are not as easy as they might seem.

There are no easy texts, all of them challenging us to re-think our lives and the world, and the way we understand God, and the, "preposterousness," of the way God loves, that even obstinate and chronic human refusal to be faithful, doesn't keep God's love at bay.

The Book of Hosea is one of the most intriguing of all the books in the Bible. It is set in the time of the divided monarchy after the Kingdom of Israel split following the reign of Solomon, into the larger northern kingdom, called Israel, and the smaller southern kingdom, called Judah.

For awhile the two countries lived side-by-side, until Israel was conquered by the Assyrians. The Book of Hosea stands as a warning, and a proclamation against the northern kingdom, predicting its destruction as punishment for its sins.

The actual prophet Hosea did not merely speak a word on God's behalf against the Israelites, but more importantly lived one, and very provocatively so. My guess is that most people who sometimes call the bible, "the good book," but don't spend much time

reading it, would be a little surprised to find this story in it.

Hosea married a prostitute, or a woman of unfaithfulness, as a living visual aide, illustrating the relationship between God and Israel, with God as the dutiful husband and Israel as the chronically unfaithful wife.

Our sensibilities in recent times have been changed because we know that the experience of many women who fall into prostitution was *not* that they were of low character, but often they had been trafficked, or made destitute by the men who were supposed to protect them, or just by tragically unfortunate circumstances that made their behavior less a rebellion and more an act of survival.

So there is a clarification to be made. There *is* an infidelity that is real, practiced by people who are not in a situation of need. Sometimes it is men, and it *can* be women too. That is what is being referred to here, and even if we would rather be reading a more uplifting story, we can not deny the fact of duplicity and dishonor, infidelity and unrighteousness, whether it be in the time of the divided monarchy or of Jesus, of Charlemagne or the Enlightenment, right up to our own time, it is all around us.

Furthermore, the infidelity of the wife here is illustrative of the infidelity of the nation, human infidelity, and that is *not* characterized by sexual immorality, but by injustice, greed, and a disregard for the pain of those

whose lives are cast aside in the pursuit of power and wealth on the part of those who can pursue them.

There were three children; the first was to be named Jezreel, which is a valley in Israel, at which a battle had taken place, King Saul had been defeated by the Philistines, and later one Israelite dynasty had massacred another.

Both of these military campaigns are meant to represent evidence of Israel's infidelity. Incidentally, another name for Jezreel is Megiddo, which is the root of the term Armageddon, the mountain of Megiddo, which is also the scene of another battle in the Apocalypse, the place of the final battle at the end of the age. The first son was to be named Jezreel.

But the other two have even more intriguing names. The first one is named, "Not Loved." I am sure there have been many children born to parents who did not want them, and did not love them, but this is the only case in which someone was brazen enough to name them after it. The last was, "Not My People," and stand as ways of expressing God's disappointment at the continued rebellion upon the part of Israel's people. That is quite a living visual aide.

After all this, right here in the first chapter, there is a telling change. The prophet is at his most prophetic when he proclaims the remarkable outcome of it all:

"Yet the Israelites will be like the sand in the seashore, which cannot be measured or counted. In the place

where it was said to them, 'you are not my people,' they will be called 'children of the living God.' The people of Judah and the people of Israel will be united . . . “

As bizarre and troubling as are the images in the Book of Hosea, there is gospel hope in them, right from the start. Of course, one must admit, that seen from the perspective of what Israel was, it has never been reconciled, not even in the form of the modern state. But seen as a statement of hope for all humanity, the message of reconciliation and unity still rings true both as a value to be sought, and as a future reality to be anticipated.

That is the message of the prophet to the people of Israel, and to the human race, and the message about prayer too, as Jesus taught, and we pray it as children of the living God,

Father,
Sanctify your name
Let *your* kingdom come
Our daily bread, give it to us everyday
Forgive us our sins, as we forgive our debtors
Do not bring us to the test;

As we await the coming day, and grow in grace and in faith and in love, because we are called as citizens of the heavenly kingdom, children of the living God.