

The Seventh Sunday after Pentecost – Proper 12 – The Rev. Canon Joan Anthony 7.24.22
Hosea 1:2-10, Psalm 85, Colossians 2:6-19, Luke 11:1-13

Each week as we come together to worship, we hear four pieces of Scripture, one from the Hebrew Torah or Writings, one from the Psalms, a Christian Epistle and a Gospel. All of these were written in another time and out of another culture and tradition. We no longer worship in one Temple in Jerusalem, no longer bring animals to be sacrificed. We no longer travel on foot or think the world is flat.

This morning we heard a part of the story of Hosea's life, a story difficult, even distasteful to hear. The truth is that this is the inspired word of God inspired for us today as well as for those who first heard it long ago. It is well to ask the question, "...what endures {from these ancient words} to speak God's word to us...?" What is it we are to glean from words so far distant from the 21st century? It would be convenient to dismiss the prophet Hosea, and even Paul and Luke as quaint writings not really speaking to our reality. If they are truly the inspired word of the living God, (and they are), then we cannot ignore them, we cannot ignore what they mean for us in our lives this day.

The Prophet Hosea comes to us as the story of a real person, whose life encompassed marriage, children, infidelity and restoration. This story mirrors the account of the broken covenant between God and Israel. It deals with the consequences of that broken relationship and the desire for healing and restoration.

A covenant is a two-sided promise between God and human beings. The Prophet Hosea speaks to us today of broken promises and the pain and alienation which are the consequences of such brokenness. It is the same kind of pain and separation that we experience when promises in which we have trusted are broken. It is pain experienced by both the one breaking the promise and the one to whom the promise is broken. We recognize the pain we cause to one another and the pain caused to us, but we seldom recognize that God, too as being caused pain by our actions or inaction. No one goes away free.

But, in living this story, Hosea has gone into the depth of alienation and come out the other side, to healing and restoration. This prophet speaks to us of the possibility of reconciliation and healing in our relationship with God and with one another. It is hard and difficult work, requiring commitment, faith and time, but it is work well worth doing.

Against this background of broken relationship and pain, of healing and restoration that we hear the simple request of one of Jesus disciples. "Teach us to pray". This is a request we recognize maybe even a request we have made ourselves. Teach us to pray. The disciples have watched Jesus go away frequently to pray. They have seen Jesus return from prayer rested, energized and strengthened. Seeing this is what prompts them to ask that they be taught to pray as Jesus does. It seems like a simple request. Teach us to pray. Teach us to speak to God and to know that God listens and God responds. Isn't that what we hope for when we pray? The prayer that Jesus teaches, what we know as the Lord's Prayer is simple. Give, forgive, lead and deliver us. In its format and subject the prayer given by Jesus closely resembles other ancient Jewish prayers, prayers found in the psalms and elsewhere. There is a pattern here. A template of prayer: request followed by thanksgiving; complaint followed by praise. The disciples would have recognized this outline. We recognize it too. It deals with the essential

needs of all human beings. Give us bread, forgiveness us when we go astray, show us the way and connect us to God.

The prayer given by Jesus goes further. It is not a passive prayer, not one to be undertaken lightly or mindlessly, without conscious thought and obligation. What we ask for ourselves, we are to provide for others. Through this prayer Luke tells us we are committed to participating in bringing about God's intention for the world. The pattern of prayer given is one of request, gratitude, and encouragement. It is meant to bring us to the place where we recognize that we are co-creators with God in the redemption of the world. Prayer honestly prayed brings us inevitably to action. In the words often heard, we are the hands and feet of Jesus. That is a sobering thought.

Theologian, John Dominic Crossan writes about the Lord's prayer and all Christian prayer as that by which we are empowered by God for participation and collaboration with God. The purpose is of such participation and collaboration is to bring about what Crossan calls "distributive justice" in the world. We often think of justice in terms of law and punishment. Distributive justice in contrast is that in which "All God's people receive a fair share of God's earth." "Covenant with God ...involves the exercise of {this} distributive justice in God's world and on God's earth." Such justice returns us full circle to the to the prophets. To share fairly with one another is the central message of all of the prophets. The prophet Micah says it in a few words. God "...has told you what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God?" To pray is to be engaged and empowered in the healing and reconciliation of the world.

Prayer as Jesus teaches us is to be a continual asking, seeking, knocking, persistent, but always within the knowledge that God is the giver of good gifts. We must ask, because it is in asking that we are prepared to recognize the answer. It is in asking that we are able to receive the answer to our prayer and incorporate it into our lives. It is in asking that we become empowered by the Spirit.

"...God does not intrude but rather invites and awaits our asking." The giver of all good gifts waits...waits for us to ask. When we ask, we must be ready to be active mediators in the fulfilling of the answer to our asking. We are promised that when we ask the answer to our asking will be lifegiving, for ourselves and for the world we inhabit. "Fish and not a snake, eggs and not a scorpion."

Teach us to pray. The disciple who asked this of Jesus did not understand what he was asking. He simply knew that he longed for something more, something he saw in Jesus. Teach us to pray. When we make this simple request, we may not know or understand what we are asking. We simply know that we long for something more. Something beyond only words to connection with God. The pattern is given ask, thank and be empowered. This is the prayer that changes the world, one person, one prayer at a time.