

Pentecost 9C

Proper 12

Texts: Hosea 1:2-10

Psalm 85

Colossians 2: 6-15 (16-19)

Luke 11: 1-13

“ When the Lord first spoke to Hosea, the Lord said to Hosea, “Go, take for yourself a wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom, for the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the Lord.” Hosea 1:2

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be always acceptable, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer. Amen.

Well, that was one doozy of an Old Testament reading this morning! This passage in Hosea is considered one of the hardest texts in the entire Bible to preach. One priest wrote that when he preached on this text several years ago by the time he had gotten to the third whoredom 2 families had walked out. He didn't say whether they ever came back.

Hosea is hard to preach and hard to listen to, not only because of the language but because this passage has been used in the past to subjugate and validate abuse of women. The Vatican has even used this passage to prohibit the ordination of women in the 1976 Declaration on the Question of the Admission of Women to Ministerial Priesthood.¹

It has been written that this passage has to be preached with great care and sensitivity, which I will try to do, but only you can decide afterwards whether those efforts were successful. So, let me set the stage for this difficult reading.

Hosea was a prophet through both prosperous and calm times as well as difficult economic and political times. He was from the Northern Kingdom and he prophesized around 750 years before the birth of Christ.

From around 786 and for the next forty years things were going well for Israel and it was a calm, prosperous time. But during this prosperity Israel became more interested in obtaining wealth than justice, more interested in consumption and power than honest business practices.

¹ New Interpreter's Bible. Vol. VII, p. 227

Israel was also very proud of its military prowess and its ability to protect its people. As a result, the people of Israel became very complacent and arrogant. Israel's prosperity led to injustice, which in turn led to immorality and an increasing reliance on military power.

From around 746 B.C.E. to 721 things began to radically change. There was political turmoil and uncertainty. Hosea saw no less than six kings on the throne of Israel until the capital of Israel, Samaria, fell to the Assyrians. It was a literal bloodbath with all six kings in that time frame dying violently. Assassination was the order of the day.

Israel, perhaps due to a mixing of cultures, perhaps due to the uncertainty of the times, starts to incorporate religious rites of the Canaanites in their worship. Particularly offensive was the people's participation in cultic rites that worshiped the fertility god, Baal.

Because fertility, both of the people and the land was so important it was believed that making a sacrifice to Baal and coming together with a temple prostitute would insure a good harvest.

Israel was trying to hedge its bets. Israel knew it was in covenant with God, that only God was their God and only Israel was God's people. Israel knew that there was only one God. Israel knew that God alone was responsible for providing the land and its abundance, but just in case...

Israel promised to worship only God and in not trusting God enough to give Israel all that she needed and all that God promised, Israel goes to another god.

Going to the temple and being with the temple prostitute was about more than Israel hedging its bets, it was an act of worship. This was what was so crushing; this was the ultimate sin.

It is during this time that Hosea is told to take a prostitute for his wife. He marries Gomer, which literally means, "to come to an end." His very marriage is a visual sign to Israel of its transgressions. Gomer is a sign of the broken covenant, of the covenant coming to an end. It was a

more powerful sign of Israel's sin than any words Hosea could have spoken.

Together Hosea and Gomer have three children, although it is disputed as to whether all of them were fathered by Hosea. These children, these poor, poor children are given names that are reminders to Israel of her ongoing faithlessness to God and the covenant between them.

The first child is a son named "Jezreel" which means "God sows." It was also the site of a massacre where not only the corrupt were killed, but innocent royal bystanders who just happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time were also killed. Jezreel was a walking reminder to Israel of death and of Israel's military and political excesses.

The second child born was named "Lo-ruhamah" which literally means, "She is not pitied" or "She is not loved." Israel will no longer experience God's mercy and compassion. Lo-ruhamah is a living, breathing vision of what Israel has thrown away by being unfaithful.

The last child is a son named "Lo-Ammi" which means "not my people." Israel has broken the covenant. The covenant entered into so many years before, the covenant which defined how Israel understood herself and her place in the world, was ruptured. "I will be your God and you shall be my people" has turned into "You are not my people." Could there be anything worse than that? No.

God is not punishing Israel. God is not walking away from Israel. God is not breaking covenant with Israel. Israel has already done that. God is not announcing future punishment of Israel; God is simply stating a fact. Israel has walked away from God and in doing so has broken covenant and thrown away the love that God has for her.²

I think one of the reasons this text is hard to preach is that we so often focus on the wrong characters. This text is not about Hosea and Gomer. This text is not about some dysfunctional family that simply can't get its act together to care honestly and lovingly for one another.

² www.workingpreacher.org Clinton McCann 7/25/10

We tend to focus on the human parts played in the really hard biblical texts (because after all it is all about us isn't it?). But when we focus on the story of us we miss the story of God. The Bible is God's story, not our story. This text is not about Hosea and Gomer but about God and his love for Israel even when Israel is unfaithful.

The Book of Hosea is all about God and God's aching for the one he loves who has walked away from that love.

There are two deep theological propositions in this text that certainly speak to us today. The first is that God experiences the suffering that love produces.³ God has been betrayed. God has given all he has and we have turned to other loves and put them in God's place.

God knows the agony of having loved and lost. We only need look at the cross to know that that is true. All of Israel's unfaithfulness and all of ours hangs on that cross, bleeds on that cross, and dies on that cross.

The second theological proposition is that how we choose to live really does matter.⁴ It really does make a difference for how we will live with God. Do we live like we believe that our security lies in our relationship with God or do we too try and hedge our bets?

Where we put our security may differ from one person to another, but if that sense of security is not rooted in God then it is in the wrong place.

Have we like Israel put our security in our military prowess? Have we put our security in Wall Street or global commerce? Have we put our security in government? All of these can, will, and have failed us in the past.

There has been only one constant in the world since it began and that constant has been God's love, God's love for creation and for us. How do we know this?

³ Feasting on the Word Year C vol. 3 p. 268

⁴ *ibid* p. 268

**It's simple really; "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that all that believe in him may not perish but have eternal life."
John 3:16**

Elizabeth Achtemeier, a noted Old Testament scholar has written, "God gathers up and incarnates our sins before our eyes-in the prophet Hosea and finally in our dying savior upon the cross. And those incarnations are intended to lead us to repentance."⁵

Repentance, not punishment, is what God wants for us and from us. Throughout scripture we see this played out again and again. Throughout scripture we will see that the story of God never stops at rejection. "Rejection is never the last act of the divine drama. It is always about reconciliation."⁶ Always.

That is the good news of Hosea and all the prophets. It is the good news brought to us in Jesus Christ. It is the good news that the world needs to hear again today.

Now, that wasn't so hard, was it?

Amen.

⁵ Achtemeier, Elizabeth. "Preaching Hard Texts of the Old Testament" (Peabody: Hendrickson 1998) p. 160

⁶ Homiletics Online. [The Darwin Awards.](#) July 29, 2001

