



BIBLE STUDIES THAT WORK

Pentecost 7 - Proper 12 (C)
July 28, 2019

RCL: Hosea 1:2-10; Psalm 85; Colossians 2:6-19; Luke 11:1-13

Hosea 1:2-10

The opening verses of the book of Hosea can easily seem harsh and a bit bizarre. Hosea is told at the start of his prophetic ministry to take “a wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom” because the land of Israel had forsaken the Lord. Hosea follows the instructions of God and takes Gomer as his wife and has three children. These children are given names that reflect the nature of Israel’s relationship with their God: Jezreel, for God would soon put an end to the house of Israel and avenge the blood of Jezreel; Lo-ruhamah, for God would no longer have pity on the house of Israel; Lo-ammi, for the children of Israel were not the people of God and the Lord was no longer their God.

Hosea’s marriage and his children serve as metaphors for the relationship between Israel and their God, and as these opening verses reveal, this relationship is quite strained. Israel has abandoned their God, and it seems that their God has, in turn, abandoned them. But then there is a turn in the final verse. Hope still abides. The people of Israel shall be “like the sand of the sea, which can be neither measured nor numbered.” Though it had once been said to them, “‘You are not my people,’ it shall be said to them, ‘Children of the living God.’” God’s steadfast love and covenant promise endure forever, even when we disobey and wander far off. That is the message of this passage from Hosea and of the entirety of Scripture.

- How have you experienced this abiding and steadfast love of God that never ceases?

Psalm 85

The sequence of this psalm offers us a model for our own prayer. The psalmist begins by acknowledging the amazing deeds God has done and then continues with pleas for mercy. The psalmist then writes, “I will listen to what the Lord God is saying, for he is speaking peace to his faithful people and to those who turn their hearts to him.” The psalmist knows that God is already speaking peace to us; we must only be attentive to what God is already saying to us. This model of thanking God and acknowledging God’s goodness, asking for God’s mercy, and then listening for what God is speaking to us in this moment offers a helpful pattern for prayer.

- How might you listen and be attentive to the peace that God is speaking to you?

Colossians 2:6-19

This passage from the Epistle to the Colossians offers several rich and memorable images in its discussion of the person of Christ and his death on the cross. One such image is of Christ as the one in whom “the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily.” The epistle writer empathizes that in Christ, we are given an image of the invisible God. Christ is presented as the fullness of God, and we who believe in him and follow him find our fullness in him who is the head over all.

A second image is found in the discussion of what Christ accomplished on the cross. When we were dead in our trespasses, God made us alive again by forgiving us all our sins, “erasing the record that stood against us with its legal demands. He set this aside, nailing it to the cross” (Colossians 2:14). The epistle writer depicts a vivid picture of our sins nailed to the cross and erased. Here we find good news and a vision of the new life we have in Christ. God has indeed made us alive together with Christ.

- How does it feel to envision our sins nailed to the cross with Christ?

Luke 11:1-13

At times, we make prayer into something much more difficult than God intends it to be. In this passage from Luke’s gospel, we hear that Jesus’ disciples saw him praying and asked him to teach them how to pray. The prayer he taught them is one that we know and pray virtually every time we gather as a community to pray. The words may be so familiar to us that we overlook the simplicity of the petitions. Jesus invites his followers to address their God as Father, showing them that the invitation to prayer is an invitation to a relationship with an intimate God, not one who is distant and unconcerned with our needs and desires. Jesus teaches his followers to pray for the coming of God’s kingdom, for the sustenance they need each day, for the forgiveness of their sins and the strength to forgive those who have sinned against them, and for protection from times of trial. They are simple yet powerful petitions. Jesus taught his disciples to come before their God and bring their requests with simplicity and honesty.

Jesus also reminded his followers that God is always good and faithful. God hears our prayers and always provides for us. Jesus never promised that all of our prayers would be granted just as we asked them. Though it may seem that God does not hear our prayers, Jesus promises that those who ask of God will indeed receive. A collect on page 394 of the *Book of Common Prayer* puts it this way: “Heavenly Father, you have promised to hear what we ask in the Name of your Son: Accept and fulfill our petitions, we pray, not as we ask in our ignorance, nor as we deserve in our sinfulness, but as you know and love us in your Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.”

- How can you simplify your life of prayer to draw closer to God?

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