



BIBLE STUDIES THAT WORK

Pentecost 7
Proper 12 (C)
July 24, 2022

[RCL] Hosea 1:2-10; Psalm 85; Colossians 2:6-15, (16-19); Luke 11:1-13

Hosea 1:2-10

Hosea, like the major prophets, performs prophetic sign acts to convey the Lord's prophetic message, in addition to spoken or written words. These acts are grotesque in the literary sense: they are over the top and cannot be ignored; they are obtrusive, demanding the attention of the inattentive. In Hosea's case, he has married a woman who is adulterous and unfaithful to their marital covenant. She gives birth to children who are quite likely not Hosea's offspring, yet will be raised in his house. Some commentators have speculated that her adultery was also idolatry, as a result of engaging in the Ba'al sex cult. This marriage is a sign act for God's relationship with Israel; Hosea's wife's adultery is paralleled with the idolatrous behavior of Israel, God's chosen people. Hosea's faithfulness to his unfaithful wife mirrors God's faithfulness to unfaithful Israel. The legal and constitutional language of other prophets is inadequate to capture the intimate love of God betrayed by Israel.

The harsh language used in naming Gomer's children is jarring, but it finds resolution at the end of this pericope: Those children who were called "not his children"—neither Hosea's nor the Lord's—are finally restored into the house of God. It seems that the Lord can redeem even the fruit of idolatry. Augustine saw these children as the foretelling of the salvation of the Gentiles. St. Irenaeus saw God building the church from the least likely people.

- What idols do I have in my life drawing me away from the Lord, causing me to be unfaithful to him?
- In verse 7, we see that not by military might will the Lord save Judah, but by the Lord their God. Are there other forces I'm relying on for salvation? In what ways can I orient myself back to the Lord my God?

Psalm 85

Psalm 85 has three major parts. The first section (vv. 1-3) is a direct address to the Lord, praising the Lord for being a gracious benefactor to the people of Israel. The second section (vv. 4-7) continues the direct address but turns to supplication. Affliction is over, but the people, the psalmist, are not made whole: How

long Lord until you have fully restored what was broken? The third section no longer addresses God but rather testifies to the Lord's great character and the nearness of his promises.

One should not miss the prevalence of the "land" in this psalm. Over and over, God's promises to his people refer to the land. The land in the agricultural society is a means by which God bestows blessings. But it is also the gift of refuge to a nomadic people seeking rest. And we can see it as representative of our spiritual life. Our land is arid without the Lord's grace and mercy. If we are separated from the Lord of Heaven and Earth, our lives cannot give forth any fruit. As St. Augustine suggests, everything that we harvested from our land is only reaped because of what God has first sown.

- Where might I open my land, my heart, that the glory of the Lord might dwell therein?
- How can we use the framework of the psalm to guide the way we pray to God about the fruit we hope to bring forth in our lives?

Colossian 2:6-15, [16-19]

Paul is writing to a church in the center of the religious and philosophical marketplace that was Asia Minor. Greek and Roman philosophies and religions interplayed with local cultic worship. At the time of Paul's writing, any combination of these religions would be legally permissible, as long as one also subscribed to the Roman Imperial Cult, worshiping the emperor as a god. Paul, then, is writing to strengthen the Colossians' resolve in resisting this marketplace and specifically reminding them of the true supreme ruler of the universe; the head of all things is Jesus Christ, not the emperor.

Paul writes of the mystery and promise of Christ. In the Incarnation, Christ recapitulates the Godhead and Humanity; as Lancelot Andrewes asserts, all deity and all humanity are gathered together in Christ. It is here we find Jeremiah's new covenant, a spiritual circumcision of the heart. In the Incarnation, we find union with God; with him, we die and are raised in our baptism. It is this sacrament that the Lord has chosen as his instrument for the forgiveness of sins. Our salvation is in becoming one with Christ. As Athanasius said, "God became man that man might become God."

- We do not have emperor worship, but what sort of things does our culture value above our Lord Jesus Christ?
- What does it mean for you personally to have been buried and raised with Christ?

Luke 11:1-13

This passage in Luke's Gospel begins a long section about discipleship, so it is fitting that he begins by talking about prayer. The Lord's Prayer serves as a template for structuring prayer (it is shorter than Matthew's version): adoration, supplication, and confession, as well as moral implications. Luke impresses the attitude and ethos of prayer: it should be continuous. As Paul said, we "pray without ceasing."

Jesus' disciples speak for us when they ask Jesus to teach them to pray. Such a request is one that we might make today! After all, as St. Thomas Aquinas says, "God is the first mover of all things," so we must rely on the Holy Spirit to move us first, that we might participate in prayer. But the Lord has given us the

words to pray that we might not be completely lost. Not only has he given us the Lord's Prayer, but he has also given us all of Scripture, most notably the Psalms. And these prayers are both temporal and spiritual. The Lord himself has taught us to pray for both our physical needs and our spiritual needs.

- Can you recall a time you felt unable to pray?
- Do you have a memory of a prayer that was answered? Do you have a memory of a prayer that you felt was unanswered? How did you respond in those cases?

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