St. Luke's Episcopal Church

For the Love of God

Pentecost VIII, Proper 13C
August 3, 2025
St. Luke's Episcopal Church
The Very Rev. Holladay Sanderson

Hosea 11:1-11 Psalm 107:1-9,43 Colossians 3:1-11 Luke 12:13-21

We have very big pointed questions to answer in this week's lessons …
or the "Propers"… to use Episcopalian-ese to name our lessons.
We are asked to ponder
who or what do we put first in our lives?
God or possessions?
Which is more important to us?
The love of God or the love of possessions?
What comes first in our hearts?
The need to give of <u>ourselves</u> or
the need to acquire more <u>for</u> ourselves?
To follow our loving God or
some false idol?

The gospel begins with a fellow yammering at Jesus
about his piece of the family inheritance.
Jesus turns his question into a warning to us all that
our lives "do not consist in the abundance of possessions."
Then he offers the parable of the greedy rich man
who wanted to hoard
all of his wealth and possessions
in his ever-bigger barns.
God's lesson against his greed
was the reminder that OUR faith,
unlike that of the ancient Egyptians, believes that
we really cannot take it with us
when our time comes.

Thus, Jesus's listeners were left
with a pretty up-front gospel about wealth and greed:
topics that are found over, under, around, and
throughout ALL of our Holy Scriptures.

Our great commandment is not to HAVE;
rather it is to LOVE.
And loving calls us to the opposite of acquisition;
love calls us to give of ourselves
as the occasions arise in our lives.

But we need to go deeper.
God's commands are so much more meaningful to us
if we can truly grasp the depth of God's love;
of God's impatience and anger and hurt
and care and lovingkindness for us.

We hear of the rich man's fate and
we sense a bit of that anger at God's people that
the prophets Amos and Hosea expressed about God
over these last two weeks.
This morning in our Old Testament lesson,
we hear once again God's anger expressed…
but today we also hear anger tinged with anguish.

God hearkens to the Exodus itself as the lesson begins.
"When Israel was a child, I LOVED him,
and out of Egypt I called my son."
We are back at the challenges Moses met
in leading the people of Israel
out of Egypt to the Promised Land.
Whenever we hear the stories of Exodus and
the journey through the Sinai to Canaan,
one of the primary themes
is the murmuring,
the constant complaining and carping
of the people.

"The more I called them,
the more they went from me," says the Lord.
Shades of the Golden Calf
as well as any time we tend to doubt God.

Hosea continues: "they kept sacrificing to the Ba'als, and
offering incense to idols."
If God couldn't deliver,
the people (and ourselves as well) tend to look
for other sources of aid.

Then we return to God's love:
"Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk,
I took them up in my arms."
When the Israelites arrived in the Promised Land,
it was divided among the tribes.
Ephraim was one of the sons of Joseph.
From the time of Joshua onward,
the Israelites were continually learning
how to relate to God…
and not always doing a very great job of it.

So God continues in sadness,
noting that no matter how much God took care of them and
was with them and for them,
"they did not know that [God] healed them."
God continues with descriptions
of the loving care of our God who is present.

Now, I have never been a parent,
but I have 4 nieces and nephews, 8 great nieces and
now 5 great great nieces and nephews.
As an auntie/baby sitter,
I can totally relate to God
being like those of us
who lift infants to our cheeks and
bend down to them and feed them.

God's words remind us of God's tender love.
This passage is so much like Jesus in the gospels,
weeping over Jerusalem
when he laments that God had taken Jerusalem
under his wing like a mother hen does to her chicks.

How often do you parents want to be
SOOOOO angry when your children act
in bad, wrong, or misguided ways?
Here is God… just like you;
walking in that path along with you.
What a sign that we really ARE made in God's image!!!

So God, in frustration and sorrow, expresses anger and says,
because they turned from God's ways,
they will be exiled to Egypt (a traditional foe) and
to Assyria (the current dangerous foe);
their cities will be laid waste and
their leaders will no longer be of special rank.
The people of northern Israel,
the area addressed by Hosea,
have turned away from God.

We read "To the Most High they call,
but he does not raise them up at all."
A translation note from the great Old Testament scholar,
Walter Brueggemann, tells us that one Hebrew letter
could influence the meaning of "the Most High God."
Instead of calling out to our God,
the people might actually calling out to the ba'als…
to the Most High.
If so, then their cries would never be heard.

Next, we return again to God's anguish.
Our emotions, like God's own,
have been teetering back and forth
between anger and anguish.
We hear new names and wonder who they are.
Admah and Zeboiim were ancient cites on the plain and
were destroyed along with Sodom and Gomorrah.

Before God destroyed the cities,
Abraham dickered with God to keep
lowering the number of righteous people needed
in order to save Sodom and Gomorrah;
to try to ease God's anger.

Here again, we are made very aware that
the people of Israel have been instrumental
in moving God from love.. to anguish..
to anger and back again…
and always with that endless murmuring.
It is the story of the Old Testament;
the basic plotline about the exile and return of the people.

God's love, as always wins out.
God feels it in God's very inmost being.
"My compassion grows warm and tender…
I am God and no mortal."
God is reminding us that
God is not in the market
of executing revenge or retribution.
God is about loving and teaching and
being present WITH us.

Destruction is not God's way. Accountability is God's way.
There have been so many ways for the Israelites
to examine themselves and
remember the promises they originally made.
The Assyrian exile is approaching.
Now God's hope is that the people
will draw closer to God in their exile;
that the loving faith of God's community
will carry them through until their return.
"I WILL return them to their homes," says the Lord.

So… our ongoing story of Sin, Exile, Repentance, and Return
continues in this lesson
just as it does in so many stories throughout our scriptures.
Eden to Revelation (from one garden to another);
the stories in Judges;
the overarching stories surrounding both exiles, and
so forth.

The Israelites, like us, have been in a continuing cycle
in their relationship with God.

The idols we face in our world today
are many and are very tempting.
Our challenge is to wade through
the anger, the politics, the money,
the greed, the self-aggrandizement,
ignoring the least, the last and the lost…
How shall we make our own path
to God's deep and self-giving love
with all those hills to climb?

In the end, God IS and
always has been and
always will be with us,
angry… maybe… ticked off… frustrated… in anguish… sad
but always loving and
NEVER turning away from us.

God's loving embrace is <u>always</u> open to us,
patiently waiting
for our own return to God's call to follow:
to follow God with love,
in love, and
for the sake of God's steadfast love,
offered for all.

AMEN