

The Sunday Missive – July 24, 2022 The Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

Hymn 518 Christ is made the sure foundation

Christ is made the sure foundation, Christ the head and cornerstone,
Chosen of the Lord, and precious, binding all the Church in one;
Holy Zion's help for ever, and her confidence alone.

All that dedicated city, dearly loved of God on high,
In exultant jubilation pours perpetual melody;
God the One in Three adoring in glad hymns eternally.

To this temple, where we call thee, come, O Lord of Hosts, today;
With thy wonted loving-kindness hear thy servants as they pray,
And thy fullest benediction shed within its walls always.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cR9NHXnbxIU>

The Collect of the Day

O God, the protector of all who trust in you, without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy: Increase and multiply upon us your mercy; that, with you as our ruler and guide, we may so pass through things temporal, that we lose not the things eternal; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Hosea 1:2-10

When the Lord first spoke through 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." So he went and took Gomer daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son.

And the Lord said to him, "Name him Jezreel; for in a little while I will punish the house of Jehu for the blood of Jezreel, and I will put an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel. On that day I will break the bow of Israel in the valley of Jezreel."

She conceived again and bore a daughter. Then the Lord said to him, "Name her Lo-ruhamah, for I will no longer have pity on the house of Israel or forgive them. But I will have pity on the house of Judah, and I will save them by the Lord their God; I will not save them by bow, or by sword, or by war, or by horses, or by horsemen."

When she had weaned Lo-ruhamah, she conceived and bore a son. Then the Lord said, "Name him Lo-ammi, for you are not my people and I am not your God."

Yet the number of the people of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea, which can be neither measured nor numbered; and in the place where it was said to them, "You are not my people," it shall be said to them, "Children of the living God."

Psalm 85

You have been gracious to your land, O Lord* ***You have restored the good fortune of Jacob.***

You have forgiven the iniquity of your people* ***And blotted out all their sins.***

You have withdrawn all your fury* ***And turned from your wrathful indignation.***

Restore us then, O God our Savior* ***Let your anger depart from your people.***

Will you be displeased with us forever* ***Will your anger last from age to age?***

Will you not give us life once more* *That your people may rejoice in you?*

Show us your mercy, O Lord* *And grant us your salvation.*

Colossians 2:6-19

As you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the universe, and not according to Christ. For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have come to fullness in him, who is the head of every ruler and authority. In him also you were circumcised with a spiritual circumcision, by putting off the body of the flesh in the circumcision of Christ; when you were buried with him in baptism, you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead. And when you were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive together with him, when he forgave us all our trespasses, erasing the record that stood against us with its legal demands. He set this aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in it.

Hymn 435 At the name of Jesus

At the Name of Jesus, every knee shall bow,
Every tongue confess him King of glory now;
'Tis the Father's pleasure we should call him Lord,
Who from the beginning was the mighty Word.

Humbled for a season, to receive a Name
From the lips of sinners, unto whom he came,

Faithfully he bore it spotless to the last,
Brought it back victorious, when from death he passed;

Bore it up triumphant, with its human light,
Through all ranks of creatures, to the central height
To the throne of godhead, to the Father's breast;
Filled it with the glory of that perfect rest.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H6hLTA1NK1Q>

Luke 11:1-13

Jesus was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples." He said to them, "When you pray, say: 'Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us. And do not bring us to the time of trial.'"

And he said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; for a friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him.' And he answers from within, 'Do not bother me; the door has already been locked, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.' I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, at least because of his persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs.

"So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

Homily by Lenny Erickson

I'd like to take a further look at the Hosea passage that Barry read today. What I want to point out is the very personal level of the dialogue. This is the Word of the Lord that came to Hosea. It says the very "word of the Lord." It's pretty sarcastic on God's part for being "the word of the Lord." He says to Hosea, Why don't you just marry a harlot? Maybe the Israelites will then realize it's exactly what they're doing, chasing after false gods. Hosea does. And then when the kids come, God vents his spleen again. God tells Hosea what to name them, and the names he chooses for them show how disgusted he is with the Israelites. The first is Jezreel, which means "God sows," God has sown a good life for them that they care nothing for. The next, a girl, God directs to be named Lo-ruhamah, "not pitied," for "I will no longer have pity on the house of Israel or forgive them." (I love the next verse. Remember, there are two sections of the Hebrews, the N, Israel, and the S, Judah. The whole country had broken into two kingdoms, and weren't the best of friends. The verse that names Lo-ruhamah says, again, "I will no longer have pity on the house of Israel or forgive them." The next verse is added in, interpolated, by an editor from the S, Judah. It says: But I will have pity on the house of Judah, and I will save them by the Lord their God."!!) Back to the naming. The third, a boy, is to be named Lo-ammi, "I am not yours." God says, "For you are not my people and I am not your God." This could be a teacher, ranting at a particularly clueless class. It's funny, to think of Hosea writing that these were the words spoken to him by God. It's funny to think of God as "having had it, up to here." We tend to think of God in the abstract, as having a constant good will, always forgiving, being endlessly patient. Not here!

But what I want to point out is how very basic this sense of personalism is in Hebrew thought. God, among all the other ways he manifests himself--such as being the ground of all being, the All in All, First Cause, Omnipotent, Omniscient, Omnipresent—in addition to all that, God is a Person doing things persons do. There's a theological position in theology known as Personalism. Personalism does not mean personal in the sense that something is specifically mine—as "This is my personal fountain pen." Nor do I mean that it conforms to

my personal taste—as in “That bag of Twizzlers gave me personal delight.” And I definitely don’t mean “personal” as in “Jesus is my personal Savior,” which I feel is too similar to “James is my personal chauffeur.” “Personalism” is a description of a manner of existence. In Hebrew thought God is personal because God relates, thinks, reasons, wills, emotes, chooses, plans for the future, acts. That the Hebrews had this insight is clear in the Creation story and in the story of Hebrew origins. The Genesis myths of chaps. 1-11 concern the back stories of all humanity-- that is, creation, the fall, the expulsion from Eden, the growth of population, the Flood, and Babel, with the dispersion of languages. These were all relational stories—God plans and acts in relation to other characters, e.g. Adam, Eve, Noah. And right after these “Everyman” stories have been spun out, we have the story of the origin of the Hebrews in Abram, later Abraham. The Hebrews saw Abraham as the first Hebrew. Their own specific history started here. But there is something unusual for the time, in their take on God and their relationship to God.

When you look at the sweep of the history of religion in the Western world, starting say at 3000 BCE or 2500, you find gods and goddesses being worshiped—primarily goddesses for their efficacy in granting fertility to the land, the animals, and to people themselves. These gods and goddesses were conceived of as like humans, but greater than humans. They had the powers of nature in their hands, in their gift. Though the humans populated the heavens with gods and goddesses with extraordinary powers, they also gave them human-like characteristics—the gods ate, they drank to excess, they brawled, they had affairs, they married and had children, they sometimes tended to their business of keeping the natural world going, and sometimes they got lazy and needed to be prompted by prayer. The process of making one’s god like oneself, only better, is called anthropomorphism. Many critics of religion feel that most religions employ this, especially they think Judaism and Christianity does. They say God is created in these religions by taking our own characteristics, raising them to a higher level, and calling that idea we construct God. I do think that’s probably what happened in the earlier religions, but when we come to the Hebrew story of creation, we get a reversal of the concept of anthropomorphism. Now it is not mankind who makes god in their image. Now it is God who makes man in his image. The Hebrew

insight reverses the old pattern of making God in man's image. It's as if God says, "No, my chosen people are like me because I made them in my image. I am the prototype, they are the copy." The Hebrew reversal of thought was that God is the primal fact of the universe, and we are the derivative phenomena.

In the Hebrew story of Abraham (Gen. 12) Abraham's family has already left the country of Ur of the Chaldeans but had not gone to the expected destination of Canaan, rather settling halfway there, in Haran. God's first call to Abraham is to continue the trip to Canaan. Only there, when he's fully away from the influence of the religions that make their own gods, will Abraham and his family hear and understand who God is. God tells Abram and Sarah and their nephew, Lot, (maybe not in these exact words, but something like them) "Get out of Haran and move along. I'm giving you Canaan, get over there; it will be your land of plenty. We need to start over spiritually. You all have been too long in the clutches of the gods you yourselves have made. You need to start looking at the world as it really is. I am your God and I choose you and yours to be my people. I will establish a relationship with you, not you with me!" The start-over that God wanted was to get the Hebrews away from people who prayed to the gods they, themselves, made. God insisted that his chosen people realize that they didn't make him. This makes Judaism and Christianity, starting with ancient Hebrew thought, a radically different kind of religion from its contemporaries in the Near East and contradicts the critics' take concerning anthropomorphism.

There are multiple messages in these stories surrounding Abraham, the first being that Abraham and Sarah are chosen by God who will be in a special relationship with them, and that God means good for them if they can be true to the new insight about the primacy of God. And because God plans and acts for good, we can do the like because we are made in his image. It's not the other way around—because we can do these things, we make a God that also does. No, God has given to us what he is. It is this that made the religion of the Hebrews, a small scattered, hard to identify tribe, into the originators of a great world religion. When, or if, other cultures moved beyond creating their own gods they tended to say, "There are no gods" or "Everything is god" or "God is 'that one thing'." But the Hebrews said, "No, the personhood of

God is real and is a fundamental description of reality, and because it is, our personhood is real and is of ultimate value. Western religions, if they've been true to the Hebrew insight, have emphasized the importance of the person, the value of the person, the value of life, the value of esteeming persons.

Well, let's get back, at last, to Hosea, who is waiting with bated breath for our analysis! There is a connection. I came to this extended introduction through looking at the Hosea passage. Remember, God calls Hosea, just as he called Abraham. He called Hosea to take his message to his people. The Israelites are perverting his relationship to them, they are backsliding to nature religions, they are forgetting the God that made them Persons capable of loyalty, understanding, love. Abraham had to be kicked out of the bad environment in Ur and Haran and go to a new place. Now, 1000 years later, the Israelites are corrupting their relationship to God again.

God tells Hosea that he might as well marry a harlot; that's what the Israelite people are doing, running after false Gods. Even in God's sarcasm, God teaches personalism—a idea, a concept, counsel is modeled through a person. Hosea mirrors to Israel what they, themselves are doing. That a person should be an allegory is a peculiarly Hebrew idea. When Hosea follows God's sarcastic advice and marries a harlot, and children are born, each child stands for a concept, an idea. Think about this technique a bit. Aesop has animals take parts in a moral fable and sometimes the animals stand for a character trait, such as the dog in the manger for selfishness. Here the Hebrews have God speak his disdain at their behavior, and has the prophet's children symbolize God's punishment of them. I sowed goodness for you, but you ran after false gods; now I have no pity on you, and I will have nothing more to do with you. Speaking of reversals, here is another. God told Abraham that the Hebrew people would be God's people and he would be their God—the exact promises he is now taking away. To Hosea's audience he says, "...you are not my people, and I am not your God."

Hebrew personalism has two faces: 1) It attributes personhood characteristics to God. Granted, God is also more than a Person—he is the ground of all being, he is ultimate rationality, ultimate creativity,

ultimate good will, but the striking Hebrew insight is that he is a Person, capable of relating to us, loving us, that personhood is at the heart of the universe, it is in the very structure of the universe. 2) Because God is a person, one of the important ways he, as a person, relates to us is by giving us the gift of personhood to be, in that way, like him. We, too, can relate to others, reason, will, create, emote, love, as he does. He set Jesus, a person, before us to show us, through his life and teachings, how we can relate, reason, create, will, love well, authentically, with concern for the other in our actions. Jesus' very role is to show how God's Personhood can apply to humans. Personhood is not only structurally at the center of the universe; it is ethically at the center. That persons are of ultimate value is the heart of our Christian ethic. Other values should be sacrificed for personal values. Jesus, the ultimate person, is with us on our journey to show that it really is possible for humans to act so as to value, love, and esteem each other and work for each other's welfare.

Hymn 296 We know that Christ is raised

We know that Christ is raised and dies no more.
Embraced by death, he broke its fearful hold,
And our despair he turned to blazing joy. Alleluia!

We share by water in his saving death.
Reborn, we share with him an Easter life
As living members of a living Christ. Alleluia!

The Father's splendor clothes the Son with life.
The Spirit's power shakes the church of God.
Baptized, we live with God, the Three in One. Alleluia!

A new creation comes to life and grows
as Christ's new body takes on flesh and blood.
The universe, restored and whole, will sing: Alleluia! Amen!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DPeaqi0UJlQ>

The Thread of Life

The thread of life is filling with the hours,
Each one a slipping, multicolored bead.
Who knows what lies beyond the clasping,
Or where the shining silver thread will lead?
We only know we strive to make them perfect,
Each symmetric, full and gay;
Well knowing that, beyond the radiant center,
The other half will dwindle fast away.

Evelyn Wadsworth