



Enough

*A Sermon Preached by the Rev. Claire Nevin-Field
The Eighth Sunday after Pentecost ~ August 4, 2019*

Hosea 11:1-11

“When Israel was a youth, I loved it dearly, and out of Egypt I called my child. But the more I called them, the further they turned from me, making sacrifices to the Ba’als and burning incense to carved images. I taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by the arm—but they don’t acknowledge that I was the one who made them whole. I led them on a leash of human kindness—with bonds of caring. I removed the yoke from their necks and stooped to feed them. Now they will return to Egypt and Assyria will rule over them because they refuse to return to me. Swords will flash in their villages, destroying their gates and devouring them because of their plans. My people are determined to turn away from me! Even though they cry out to the heights, they will not be lifted up. How can I abandon you, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? How can I make you like Admah? How can I treat you like Zeboiim?§ My heart is aching within me; I am burning with compassion! 9 No, I can’t do it! I cannot act on my righteous anger! I will not turn around and destroy Ephraim! For I am God—no mere mortal—the Holy One who walks among you! 10 They will follow YHWH, who will roar like a lion! When they hear that great roar, the children of God will return from the west, trembling. They will come out of Egypt trembling like sparrows, from Assyria, like doves. I will resettle them in their own homes,” says YHWH.¶

Psalm 107:1-9, 43

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| 1 We give you thanks, O God, for you are good; *
your mercy endures for ever. | 6 Then they cried to you in their trouble, *
and you delivered them from their distress. |
| 2 Let all those whom you have redeemed proclaim *
that you redeemed them from the hand of the foe. | 7 You put their feet on a straight path *
to go to a city where they might dwell. |
| 3 You gathered them out of the lands; *
from the east and from the west,
from the north and from the south. | 8 Let them give thanks to you for your mercy *
and the wonders you do for your children. |
| 4 Some wandered in desert wastes; *
they found no way to a city where they might dwell. | 9 For you satisfy the thirsty *
and fill the hungry with good things. |
| 5 They were hungry and thirsty; *
their spirits languished within them. | 43 Whoever is wise will ponder these things, *
and consider well your mercies, O God. |

Colossians 3:1-11

Since you’ve been resurrected with Christ, set your heart on what pertains to higher realms, where Christ is seated at God’s right hand. Let your thoughts be on heavenly things, not on the things of earth. After all, you died, and now your life is hidden with Christ in God. But when Christ—who is your life—is revealed, you too will be revealed with Christ in glory. So put to death everything in you that belongs to your old nature: promiscuity, impurity, guilty passion, evil desires and especially greed, which is the same thing as idolatry. These are the sins which provoke God’s wrath. Your own conduct was once like this, when these things were your very life. But now you must rid yourselves of them all: anger, rage, malice, slander and abusive language. Stop lying to one another. What you have done is put aside your old self with its past deeds and put on a new self, one that grows in knowledge as it is formed anew in the image of its Creator. And in that image, there is no Greek or Hebrew; no Jew or Gentile; no barbarian or Scythian; no slave or citizen. There is only Christ, who is all in all.

Luke 12:13-21

Someone in the crowd said to Jesus, “Teacher, tell my brother to give me my share of our inheritance.” Jesus replied, “Friend, who has set me up as your judge or arbiter?” Then he told the crowd, “Avoid greed in all its forms. Your life

isn't made more secure by what you own—even when you have more than you need.” Jesus then told them a parable in these words: “There was a rich farmer who had a good harvest. “ ‘What will I do?’ the farmer mused. ‘I have no place to store my harvest. I know! I’ll pull down my grain bins and build larger ones. All my grain and goods will go there. Then I’ll say to myself: You have blessings in reserve for many years to come. Relax! Eat, drink and be merry!’ “But God said to the farmer, ‘You fool! This very night your life will be required of you. To whom will all your accumulated wealth go?’ “This is the way it works with people who accumulate riches for themselves, but are not rich in God.”

Today's reading from the Book of Hosea, one of the 12 "other" prophets in the Hebrew Scriptures is beautiful. But everything that comes before this chapter is pretty grim—a story of relationship between lover and beloved wracked with betrayal. God's people have done what they, what we, continually do—and that is wander far away from God. Sometimes we wander off after shiny objects, sometimes after our own ideas of self that have no room for God, but whatever we are pursuing, wandering tends to be our thing. And God, despite being spurned over and over again, keeps reaching out, trying to find a way to get us back by the Holy side.

Hosea lived when Israel was in a covenantal relationship with God—a covenant that essentially boiled down to "I will be your God and you will be my people." As part of the covenant, God gave the people 10 Holy Words or Commandments—essentially a love letter outlining how to live in good relationship with each other and with the earth. Live this way, God said, and your lives will go pretty well. Which sounded great, until it didn't. Until something other than God looked good, or until things were going really well and we felt like we didn't actually need God around—we were doing fine on our own, thank you very much. So every time we started checking out other gods, God would speak through one prophet or another—reminding us of God's ways, God's commandments, and warning of the pretty awful consequences we bring on ourselves by living otherwise. Hosea spent the first 10 chapters of the Book waving his arms frantically and trying to get the people's attention—trying to get them to turn back to God. Back to the path of respecting the dignity of all human beings, of all life. God, Hosea warned, is offended by you and your ways. God's heart is breaking. And things are about to go really badly for you if you don't change course right now.

In Hosea's time things were bad: priests and religious leaders were running amok and exploiting the poor and the weak—interpreting scripture to justify their own prejudices and desires, creating rules to ensure they remained on top, hopping into bed with the King, and using religion as a weapon against the other. The leaders of the people were abusing and exploiting them—making life easy for their buddies and those with wealth, and treating everyone else as not really human. I don't know what the average person thought of all of this. Don't know if people refused to pay the Temple tax. I don't know if many didn't agree with the behavior of their leaders but were too tired or scared or apathetic and hopeless to say anything, so they just silently went on with their lives.

Hosea could be, is, speaking to us today. We have gone far, far away from God's dream for us and for the world. When you get to the root of it, we are a people whose lives are ruled by fear. A people whose worth is counted by bank accounts, houses, cars, and careers. A people who talk about God a lot but whose religions look awfully comfortable with the status quo and certainly don't want to challenge the rich and the powerful. A people who are thoroughly divided by race, class, ethnicity, and just about any other label you can think up. We have chased other gods so far down the path that we are lost and when we turn around we don't see the way back.

The last 2 ½ years it seems we have moved rapidly along the path away from God—it has been horrifying. We have seen Christians, those who claim to imitate Jesus, screaming hate filled things about people of color, about migrants, about the other, at political rallies. We have seen a dramatic increase in white supremacist rallies and activity—while the President defends them saying there are "good people on both sides". And just yesterday a white nationalist slaughtered 20 people in a Walmart in El Paso, and another mass shooting occurred in Dayton, Ohio. We have seen all sorts of vile dehumanizing language, language encouraging violence, coming from the President of the United States, while many in Congress say absolutely nothing, or even make excuses. And in the last 2 weeks we have seen an intense barrage of racism coming from the White House—the President telling 4 congresswomen of color to "go back to the countries they came from", attacking Elijah Cummings, a black congressman who has been a tireless supporter of human rights and justice, and condemning an entire city of people. And the most horrifying thing of all to me is the number of Americans, like many in Congress, actually support this, or are silent in the face of this utterly un Godly language and behavior.

I am guessing many of you read the powerful, prescient letter from the leadership of the National Episcopal Cathedral in Washington. It was addressed to the President in response to his latest offensive comments and tweets. Here is a long excerpt:

"Make no mistake about it...Mr. Trump's words are dangerous. These words are more than a "dog-whistle." When such violent dehumanizing words come from the President of the United States, they are a clarion call, and give cover, to white supremacists who consider people of color a sub-human "infestation" in America. They serve as a call to action from those people to keep America great by ridding it of such infestation. Violent words lead to violent actions. When does silence become complicity? What will it take for us all to say, with one voice, that we have had enough? The question is less about the president's sense of decency, but of ours. As leaders of faith who believe in the sacredness of every single human being, the time for silence is over. We must boldly stand witness

against the bigotry, hatred, intolerance, and xenophobia that is hurled at us, especially when it comes from the highest offices of this nation. We must say that this will not be tolerated. To stay silent in the face of such rhetoric is for us to tacitly condone the violence of these words. We are compelled to take every opportunity to oppose the indecency and dehumanization that is racism, whether it comes to us through words or actions.”

I am aware, aware deep in my bones, how exhausting all of this is. Those of us who are offended by this barrage of awfulness are suffering from outrage fatigue as one dehumanizing word or action after another emanates from our leadership. And yet, we, those of us who believe in the dignity of every human being, those of us who believe that racism is an abomination to God, those of us who believe in showing compassion and care for the poor, the needy, the refugee, the migrant, the outsider, the abused, we cannot get too tired to speak and to act. We cannot let this be the new norm. Those of us who claim the name of Jesus, now more than ever, need to live like we believe it. I know many of us feel like we have been yelling from the rooftop, but we must continue to do so and those who are silent must make a choice because to be silent is to be complicit. We must speak—loudly, publicly, and clearly that our Christian faith compels us to resist racism, misogyny, homophobia, and anything else that dehumanizes any of God’s children. We must write and call our elected leaders regularly, write letters to the editor of newspapers, march, and vote. We must speak to keep our own moral compass pointing in the right direction and to help reset the moral compass of a nation that has wandered far, far off course. The stakes could not be higher and we cannot be silent.

So where is the good news? It is, as Hosea writes, that the God who taught us to walk, who took us up in Holy arms, who was to us like those who lift infants to their cheeks, that God, the God of the Covenant, the God of infinite love, is with us. It is that God will give us strength to sustain us, even and especially when things look hopeless—that is God’s specialty. It is that we Christians of all people know that, when things look bleak—when it is Good Friday—we know that Easter is coming. We do not know when it will be—the wait might be awfully long—but Easter is coming. And in the meantime, we have a lot we must say, and we have a lot of work to do.