

Luke 11:1-13

Jesus teaches on prayer, and on the need for persistence in prayer, reminding the disciples that God gives the Holy Spirit to all who ask.

Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.” He said, “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 3 loaves of bread; for a friend 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!”

“How much more?” How much more can I keep up with the demands of my family? How much more of this strained relationship can I take? How much more loss can I survive? How much more will the church take from me? How much more can I give before I simply lose it? How much more can I trust in the preaching of God’s Word before, in the midst of the hate and violence and hopelessness of the world, the Gospel starts sounding like just a figment of my imagination? How much more can we hear about the manifestations of racism, terrorism, homophobia, xenophobia, before we begin to believe dystopia as the norm over the reign of God?

We need these words from Jesus, that whenever we say, “how much more?” from our places of hurt and pain and loss, God’s response is, “how much more will I give you?” That whenever we voice, “how much more?” from our locations of abandonment and rejection, God says, “how much more do I promise to be with you? That whenever we utter, “how much more?” from our spaces of disillusionment and disappointment God says, “how much more do I love you?” For every “how much more?” we say and pray - which we need to say, have to say, cannot help but pray in our times of need and grief and longing, God responds with God’s “how much more.” (Karoline Lewis)

COCU 49C READINGS

Hosea 1:2-10

God instructs Hosea to marry a prostitute, and give his children names that prophesy God’s judgement on Israel, but also God’s ultimate restoration.

When the Lord first spoke through Hosea, God said, “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 (*‘God sows’*); 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 (*‘not pitied’*), 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 (*‘not my people’*), 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.”

Through Hosea’s marriage to Gomer and the birth of the children, God’s long-suffering love is enacted. In the end God opts for compassion and forgiveness as the way to life. The fact that Hosea chose a prostitute for a wife or found that his wife had become adulterous served to show that the people had prostituted themselves with other gods. The children’s names embody the judgement of God. Jezreel embodies the punishment the people are soon to reap. The city of Jezreel had been the scene of much violence, including the murder of Naboth by Ahab (1 Kings 21), the killing of Ahab’s wife Jezebel and his sons and of Canaanite devotees (2 Kgs 9:37; 10:1-11). It had become a byword for violence and torture. The second child’s name signifies an end to God’s pity and forgiveness of the people, as if God’s compassion has worn thin. (Some scholars think it likely that a Judean editor may have exempted the southern kingdom of Judah from the judgement. Perhaps their reforms exempted them from the harsher criticism due their northern neighbours). The third child’s name indicates God’s covenant with the people is now at an end. Their apostasy means a breaking of the covenant from their side, so that they can no longer be seen as God’s people. At the end, the tenor of the passage shifts abruptly, promising that they would once again be called ‘children of the living God’, as if the breaking of the covenant was too terrible to contemplate. (Howard Wallace)

Psalm 85

A song in celebration of God's grace and forgiveness, and God's blessing in restoring God's people.

Lord, you were favourable to your land; you restored the fortunes of Jacob. You forgave the iniquity of your people; you pardoned all their sin. You withdrew all your wrath; you turned from your hot anger.

**Restore us again, O God of our salvation,
and put away your indignation toward us.**

Will you be angry with us forever?

Will you prolong your anger to all generations?

Will you not revive us again, so your people may rejoice in you?

Show us your steadfast love, O Lord, and grant us your salvation.

Let me hear what God the Lord will speak, for he will speak peace to his people, to his faithful, to those who turn to him in their hearts. Surely his salvation is at hand for those who fear him, that his glory may dwell in our land. Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss each other. Faithfulness will spring up from the ground, and righteousness will look down from the sky. The Lord will give what is good, and our land will yield its increase. Righteousness will go before him, and will make a path for his steps.

The psalm breaks into three sections: the past, the present and the future. The psalmist recalls how Yahweh was favourable to the land, restored its fortunes and forgave his people and how Yahweh withdrew his anger and turned from his wrath. The next section is full of imperatives ('restore us again', 'put away your indignation'; 'show us your steadfast love', 'grant us your salvation'). Questions are raised about the immediate future ('will you...?'). There is no hiding the seriousness of the people's sin; thoughts of divine anger fill them. Their hope is that God's anger with his people may be put aside so that 'your people may rejoice in you'. In the last section, the mood and tenses change again. The mood is optimistic, and overflows into hyperbole. They reiterate the salvation prophecy of Hosea 2:14-23. The words of the psalm speak of God's peace for his people. The abstract qualities of Yahweh ('steadfast love, faithfulness, righteousness, and peace or *shalom*') are personified and brought to life in an act of embrace, joy and harmony. Faithfulness springs up from the ground; righteousness looks down from the sky reminding us of the 2 parts of the created universe in Genesis 1 – the dome of the sky above, and the earth below, as if it now flourishes with the qualities of God. *(Howard Wallace)*

Colossians 2:6-19

Paul encourages believers to sink their roots deep into Christ and find their completeness in Christ. He reminds us that in Christ our sinful nature was 'circumcised' and we have been raised to new life. So we no longer need to pander to legalism.

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. Therefore do not let anyone condemn you in matters of food and drink or of observing festivals, new moons, or sabbaths. These are only a shadow of what is to come, but the substance belongs to Christ. Do not let anyone disqualify you, insisting on self-abasement and worship of angels, dwelling on visions, puffed up without cause by a human way of thinking, and not holding fast to the head, from whom the whole body, nourished and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows with a growth that is from God.

On the basis of what God had done in Christ, Paul proclaimed the good news that everything is changing! For some of us, that is the best news anyone could ever give us. For others it sort of bounces off the layers of protection we have built up around our very souls to fend off the pain of this world. Many of us are so closed in on ourselves that we never experience the transformation Paul was talking about. The "down side" of the good news - if you want to call it that - is that you have to be vulnerable to experience the changes that God is in the process of making in this world. That's why the most vulnerable people in our world seem to have a way of pointing us most clearly to what God is doing. They are the ones who are most open to the changes our God is in the process of making in this world. *(Alan Brehm)*