

Seventh Sunday of Easter - May 12, 2024 Mother's day

Hosea 11:1-4 Psalm 130:5-8; and 131:1-3

“Mother's Love”

1. I never wanted to run away from home. But my little brother did. Sort of.
 - a. He couldn't have been more than 5 or 6 years old.
 - i. He had had some sort of argument with mom, about how she never let him do anything, and he had decided he had had enough
 - ii. He had made his decision: he needed to live on his own.
 - iii. When he communicated his decision to my mom, she very calmly explained that he was welcome to leave, but he had to leave all his clothes behind (including the ones he was wearing) because she had bought them for him.
 1. To us as kids, her logic seemed unassailable.
 2. And as kids, we couldn't see her heart breaking, because she had adopted my brother two years earlier, and now he threatened to leave.
 - iv. For my brother, Mom's request was an unexpected demand.
 - v. He thought about it for a while, and decided better of it. He stayed.
2. In some ways, the relationship between God and humans is a series of departures and returns back home.
 - a. You've heard me say before that I think we can describe the whole Bible as a love story between God and humans. Well, I think today's passages help us see how bittersweet it is.
 - b. This love story is one of longing for one another.
 - i. as the Psalmist says that we wait for God “more than those who watch for the morning.”
 - ii. And as Hosea recalls, that God longed for God's people when they were isolated and suffering, and so God brought them out of Egyptian slavery.
 - c. The problem over and over is that the people of God have a short faith-attention span
 - i. No sooner do they get liberated from Egypt that they start missing what they had left behind as soon as they encountered difficulties in the desert
 - ii. As they faced hunger in the desert, they complained to God that they'd rather return to slavery, where at least they had things to eat
 - iii. Fast forward about five centuries to the setting for Hosea, and the people of God were facing another crisis, also spiritual
 1. Why should we continue to worship the one true God, when these false gods of our neighbors look so much more fun to deal with?
 2. The kind of commitment which God demanded of them seemed too hard, and they'd rather go for the religion-lite demands of idols made of clay which they could in fact order around.
 - iv. The people were, once again, desiring to turn away from the God of liberation, not acknowledging all that God had done for them, and their covenant with God.
 - v. Hosea is speaking God's words of warning, of anger, of disappointment

1. God is in disbelief that the people would opt for the Egypt option, again!
2. Only now their enslavement would be in the form of the Assyrians to the north coming down to overcome them and rule over them
- vi. But Hosea also speaks God's words of love, with tears of happy memories mingling with tears of pain
 1. My child! How I remember you in your youth, and how I remember you learning from me
 2. Yet as much as you turn away, I will not turn away from you, says God our Heavenly Mother
 3. Walter Brueggeman looks at this passage and tells us that "God not only resolves to set aside God's anger, God in fact takes divine judgment into God's own self." God takes on the pain of the broken relationship in order to heal it. That's something that is in God's very nature, as we would eventually see through Jesus
<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/narrative-lectionary/hosea-3/commentary-on-hosea-111-9-3>
- vii. It's like God is taking on more than just God's side of the relationship, but keeps coming over to our side so that our rebellion and fickle faith don't destroy our connection. And God is willing to pay the emotional price.
3. On a day like Mother's Day, one can't go too deep into the metaphor about God as our mother without acknowledging just how bittersweet that story or that title can be (or only bitter for some).
 - a. It makes sense to think of this spiritual relationship with God as Mother, because we know of those who were our mothers or who sacrificially stepped into that role, and of the ways in which they took on the emotional heavy lifting.
 - b. And we know the emotional roller coaster of journeys to bear a child, adopt a child, raise a child, some only then to see that child in a hospital or a crisis of their own making.
 - c. God as Mother gives us glimpse of the divine, but also gives us a template for our response to one another.
 - i. God is showing us the difficult path of love, a love which won't let us turn away from our connections to each other.
 - ii. God is showing us the bittersweet path of love, a love which willingly welcomes us back when we come to our senses
 - iii. God is showing us the joy of love, a love which has its moments of triumph and growth, the memories of which we carry with us.
 - d. Also present in this lesson of God as Mother, is the realization that we play a role as siblings to remind one another to go back home, back to God's loving, patient, gracious arms.
 - i. And to be the soft landing spot, or the welcoming arms, or the supportive advocate for one another as instruments of God's love through us, to do as God would do for us.
4. The love story of God and humans has many twists and turns. Thanks be to God that, in the end, we are always welcome to go back home to God.

Reflection questions

1. Think of a story when your mom, or the person who stepped into that role in your growing up, taught you something about unconditional love.
2. Read Hosea 11:1-4 in a couple of Bible versions. (We'll use a version in worship which uses maternal language for God in this passage) What does the passage teach us about God's parental love for humans?
3. What would be one thing different in our community if we loved as God loves, being willing to let people who have strayed to "return home" ?