

Where Do We Go From Here?

Hosea 11:1-11

Intro

Our passage for today gives us the Words of God as spoken through a prophet that many in the Christian church, don't know a whole about.

Isaiah? Yup.

Elijah and Elisha? Yeah, we've heard of them too.

But Hosea? He's not one of our go to, Old Testament prophets, which is more than kind of a shame, because the prophesies that Hosea articulates arise out of his experience. Hosea was married to a woman named Gomer (yeah, I know, the name is not the most attractive to our ears, but we've got to let that one go!). Hosea and Gomer have a family, they have kids. At some point, Gomer wanders away from trusting in the God of Abraham and Isaac, and begins to worship an idol named Baal.

The message that we hear through Hosea is one that is not just for the leaders of the northern kingdom of Israel, or even the general citizenry: it is in regard to his own family. Hosea knows what it feels like to have someone who he loves begin to be distant, and now God speaks through him a message that recognizes this distance in such a way that new life might be able to take place. This new life does not come easily or cheaply, but it is there.

Restoration is possible when God becomes part of the equation. The scripture reads this way.

Hosea 11:1-11

¹When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. ²The more I called them, the more they went from me; they kept sacrificing to the Baals, and offering incense to idols.

³Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk, I took them up in my arms; but they did not know that I healed them. ⁴I led them with cords of human kindness, with bands of love. I was to them like those who lift infants to their cheeks. I bent down to them and fed them.

⁵They shall return to the land of Egypt, and Assyria shall be their king, because they have refused to return to me. ⁶The sword rages in their cities, it consumes their oracle-priests, and devours because of their schemes. ⁷My people are bent on turning away from me. To the Most High they call, but he does not raise them up at all.

⁸How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, O Israel? How can I make you like Admah? How can I treat you like Zeboiim? My heart recoils within me; my compassion grows warm and tender. ⁹I will not execute my fierce anger; I will not again destroy Ephraim, for I am God and no mortal, the Holy One in your midst, and I will not come in wrath.

¹⁰They shall go after the Lord, who roars like a lion; when he roars, his children shall come trembling from the west. ¹¹They shall come trembling like birds from Egypt, and like doves from the land of Assyria; and I will return them to their homes, says the Lord.

I remember being a young lad sitting with my brother in the plush back seat of my grandparents Oldsmobile 88 (which meant that it felt like I was ½ a mile away from my brother...but I digress), when I heard my grandfather (who was behind the wheel) utter a statement that has become a running

punchline in my family ever since. I don't remember where we were going, but I heard my grandmother say, 'George, you missed it. It was right back there.'

My grandfather's response (in addition to his audible 'huff')?

'It seems someone has turned the sign'.

Every time I have missed a turn, been given incorrect directions, or had GPS start spinning around like I must be driving a top (because I am that old that I can reference the spinning of a top), I have said, or at the very least thought, 'someone must have turned the sign.'

The bugger of it is: about 90% of those times, the issue was not a sign being turned (I know, you're shocked!).

Instead, it was me not being familiar with a setting, or me just not paying enough attention as to what I should have done, which invariably left me asking the question, 'alright...so where do we go from here?' You know, so that I can get to the place that I was trying to get in the first place, before someone turned the sign and left me scrambling.

Where do we go from here? It's a feeling that all of us have felt in regard to a myriad of life's realities. Where do we go from here?

Back to the scripture. Here is the place where I am starting from theologically: we, as individuals, as a community, as humans, are fallen and not who God created us to be. We sin, and that sin causes us to be separated from one another and from God. We hear that in passage after passage. Using the example that I started out with: we know that we missed the turn that we were supposed to take...and we're not sure where to go in order to get back to where we were already supposed to be.

The question that I have in light of that starting space is this: where do we go from here?

Because knowing that you are turned around can be fine...if you are able to have some idea of where you are supposed to go, how you are supposed to move, in order to remedy that situation.

But if you don't have that direction, you'll just start meandering around doing the same stuff that you had done previously (and yes, there are way too many times that I have circled back to the road that I was supposed to take...only to miss it again! Or maybe I'm the only one who's ever done that before...).

So we are spinning...and we know it. Where do we go from here?

I believe that step one shows up in verse 10 of the 11th chapter of Hosea, when it says, "when he roars, his children shall come".

Some of you may hear that and think to yourself, 'haven't heard any roaring yet'.

How I take that portion of the scripture is that the call of God is still being spoken out into the world. It might not necessarily sound like a roar, but it's there, if we listen for it. We have received the promise from Jesus that we will be led, supported, admonished, and empowered by the Holy Spirit until such time as we are in the closer presence of the Divine. We have been promised that. That is God speaking into our world.

But as we all know, the world can be loud...really, really loud, and we can get distracted... really, really distracted by all the things that the world tells us that we should want, by all the things that we tell ourselves that we need to have in order to have anything that resembles a fulfilling life.

In very short order, it can start to feel like someone has turned the sign (or never put it up in the first place!).

But again, the promise of God speaking into the world is there to act as the reminder that if we open ourselves to the truth that God is there for us, then we will begin to be guided toward what that next step should be.

Where do we go next? We need to listen.

How do we do that?

I think the first step is moving to a place of trusting in the promises of God, and trusting that they are for us.

Do we believe that God is still calling out? Maybe.

Do we believe that God is calling out to us? Maybe...maybe not.

Again, the promise, which is not unlike that which we have heard through Hosea, is that even though we have created distance, God's passion for us is so great that it cannot be ebbed. This is to the point that the Almighty's voice calls out into the world declaring his love and commitment. God declares through Hosea, 'I will not destroy...I will call out'.

Where do we go from here? Trust in the promise and know that it is for you!

The next step is to be very intentional about inviting God into your life, into all of your life! Not just the Sunday morning part, but the commute part, the waking up and the going to bed part, the exciting part and the boring as all get out part.

As we are led to be more intentional about inviting God into our lives, scripture teaches us that we will begin to hear God, see God, recognize the presence of God through the entirety of our experience.

As always, that doesn't mean that our lives will be free from trial and difficulty. But what it does set up is the paradigm where we understand and trust that we have been created by and are kept in the hand of the Divine.

This happens through prayer, through worship, through service, through living out days that say, in so many ways, 'even in this (whatever this is) I have been blessed by God'.

Where do we go from here?

Invite God in. We have to be intentional about it because if we are not we will end up following so many of the other voices that are calling us here, there, and beyond.

And then respond by offering up thanksgiving. I cannot fully explain how thankful I have felt when I would finally arrive at the place that I was delayed getting to because I missed the turn I should have made (before someone turned the sign). We need to express that thankfulness in the midst of our lives as well. The Apostle Paul went so far as to thank God for all of the tribulations that he faced. We hear that in Hosea as the people responding to the roaring come back humbled, but knowing to whom they belong.

Where do we go from here? Respond with thanks.

Trust. Invite. Respond (with thanks).

For the first 20 years that I drove, I did not want to drive in New York City. From the number of people, to the number of streets, to the number of cars that I was dodging, to finding the place that I should park, all of it freaked me out and caused me to feel like my head was constantly on a swivel because I always felt like I was in the wrong place, going the wrong way.

As all of you know, that description does not fit the reality of the examples that you have heard from me over the last few years as you have heard multiple stories about various adventures that we have had in the city. What's the difference?

Two things. The first is experience. The more time that I have spent driving Manhattan, the more comfortable I have become.

The second is an app for my phone. Quite a few years ago I downloaded an app that gave all of the parking garages and lots that surrounded whatever address I would type in. It gave me the prices for the lot and even pictures of what the lot looks like.

All of a sudden, now I have an address as to where I am going, and visuals of what I am looking for. Now, even when someone does turn the sign, I trust that not only can I get myself spun around, but I know what I am looking for.

Last Sunday we adventured into the city to take advantage of all the kids being available to see 'Stomp', which is located in a theater in the East Village. I've never been there before, and a decade earlier I would have had myself all tensed up because I felt like I was going to get lost.

But now I trust that the information that is available, and I make use of the technology that I have (invite), which allows me to respond that at the end of the day with a sense of thankfulness because I was able to have a great time connecting with my family.

Guess what? God's Word is a whole lot more trustworthy than any app that we may download. But like the app, if we don't trust in it and become familiar with it, let alone make use of it, we will still end up feeling anxious and disconnected.

Begin to trust in the promises that have been made, be intentional about inviting God in, and then respond by thanking Him for his presence. As we begin to take these steps, we will start to discover the steps that we need to take so that we are restored to one another, restored to the Almighty.

Someone has turned the sign. The someone is sin.

But God has turned it back so that we can get to where we felt we were going all along. Trust. Invite. Respond.

After Sermon Prayer

God, You are still speaking into the world. You have told us this in so many ways. Help us to know these trust these promises and then invite You in to everything we are. You call called for us to trust in You in mind, body, and Spirit. Help us to show that in our lives. And then empower us to lift our praise, thanking You for the many ways that we are able to experience Your presence, right here, right now. God, You are showing us where we are to go. Allow us to trust in You! In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.