

Sunday on June 5 - 11 (Proper 5)

Old Testament Lesson: Hosea 5: 15 - 6: 6

The story of ***Hosea*** can set us back into our chairs, because the first thing God does is tell Hosea (his messenger to the ***Northern*** Kingdom during its last 30 or so years) to marry a ***prostitute*** and have children by her. This seems like a bizarre request. But ***wait!*** Don't you remember that one of the events at Mt. Horeb could be considered a ***marriage***—a marriage between God and the Children of Israel; and that the ***Ten Commandments*** were the marriage agreement? And do you recall that ***one*** of the commandments is to not commit ***adultery?*** As we soon learn as we begin reading Hosea, that is the picture that God wants to ***present*** through Hosea's marriage: That the ***Children of Israel***, by worshipping the Baals and Asherahs ***instead*** of God, were committing spiritual ***adultery*** against God as surely as having a relationship with a prostitute.

As we approach today's reading, we find God ***warning*** both the Northern ***and*** Southern Kingdoms (known otherwise as Israel or Ephraim, and as ***Judah***, respectively) that ***punishment*** is coming. Then, as today's reading starts, God states that he is just going to ***abandon*** them until they truly acknowledge their sin, repent, and earnestly turn back to him. And how do Israel and Judah respond? ***"No sweat,"*** they say, because even though they may have some problems here and there, they still remember that they are God's ***chosen*** people, so God is going to bless them ***anyway***, no matter what they do.

But God sees it ***differently***. He describes their love for him as ***dew*** that vanishes with the morning sun; it just doesn't last very long. So God states that ***judgment and punishment*** are going forth, because he is ***not*** impressed with sacrifices and burnt offerings (in other words, showing up in ***church*** on Sunday morning and putting ***something*** in the collection plate, but seeking life's ***pleasures*** the rest of the time). Rather, God is seeking a ***love*** for him that results in a ***desire*** for a better understanding ***of*** and relationship ***to*** God.

Epistle Lesson: Romans 4: 13-25

As St. Paul continues his discussion of the **Christian faith** with the Christians in Rome, he now provides an **example** from the Old Testament of **how** righteousness came through **faith, not** through the works of the **Law**. His example is that of **Abraham**, who was promised **an offspring** who would be heir to the whole world—referring to **Jesus**, of course. But that promise was not a result of **obedience** to the Law, which came 500 years later through Moses, but through **faith** in which Abraham **believed** God, and that belief was credited to Abraham by God as **righteousness**. Again, since the promise was based not on works but on **faith**, that promise was a **gift** of God's **grace** (unmerited favor). And because it was a **gift**, that promise would be to **all** of Abraham's offspring, which would include **all** who believe in Jesus.

To further reassure Abraham of the **surety** of his promise, God also promised Abraham that he would be the (**spiritual**) father of **many** nations. That is to say, the promise was based on **faith**, so that it did not matter whether the person who believed was **Jew** or **Gentile**. Now, Abraham was around **99** years old, and Sarah around **89** years old, when God made these promises to Abraham, and in particular, a promise of an **heir** coming from Abraham and Sarah. Abraham could **easily** have focused on Sarah's long history of **barrenness**, so that her becoming fertile at her **present** age would be unthinkable even today. Yet he focused on **God's promise**, not the **circumstances**. And that **faith** in God resulted in God declaring Abraham **righteous**. In a similar way, then, God declares **us** righteous when we believe **him**.

Gospel Lesson: Matthew 9: 9-13

Today's reading finds Jesus in **Capernaum**, where he has just healed a man who was **paralyzed**. As he continues on his way, he sees a man called Matthew, who is a **tax** collector. Now, in those days, people **really** despised tax collectors, so much so that they were automatically considered one of the **worst** of sinners. So why would Jesus extend an invitation to **Matthew** to follow him? As it turns out, Matthew accepts Jesus' invitation, and to show his **delight** in being called to be Jesus' disciple, he arranges a **banquet** at his home, to which he also invites his tax-collector **co-workers** as well as other people who were considered "**sinner**s" by the Jewish elite.

Well, it didn't take long for the **Pharisees** to see this and **criticize** Jesus, saying that he is consorting with tax collectors and sinners. But Jesus sets them straight. People go to a **physician** because they know they **need** medical care; but people who do not **realize** that they are sick do **not** go to a physician, with sometimes **disastrous** results down the road. Similarly, Jesus is there for those who realize that they are **sinner**s and **need** a savior, but those who **consider themselves** righteous will **not** benefit from God's forgiveness. Then Jesus echoes the words from our Old Testament reading for today: God is not interested in our "**sacrifices**," but rather on demonstrating the **love** of God to our neighbor.

Sunday on June 12 - 18 (Proper 6)

Old Testament Reading: Exodus 19: 2-8

A lot has happened in the **three months** since the crossing of the Red Sea into Arabia. Pharaoh's **army** has been destroyed, the bitter **water** at Marah has been made sweet, God has rained **manna** from heaven, God has provided an **abundance** of water from the rock at Horeb, the attacking **Amalekites** were defeated, and Moses' father-in-law, priest of Midian, has provided **sound advice** to Moses on how to **govern** this large body of people.

Today's reading finds the Children of Israel being led by **God** (the pillar of smoke) to the base of **Mt. Sinai**, where they encamp. God calls Moses to the **top** of the mountain, where He first of all reminds Moses (and the Children of Israel) how God has **delivered, protected, and sustained** them all during the last several months, so that He could bring them to Himself. Then God makes a **proposal** to the Children of Israel;

If they will **obey** Him and **keep** His special covenant agreement with Him, **then** God will make them His treasured **possession**, His kingdom of **priests**, and His **holy nation**.

Note two things about this proposal. First, it is a **conditional** proposal, with an "if . . . , then . . ." clause. Secondly— as a **continued** reading of Exodus will reveal, and with an understanding of Jewish **custom**— it satisfies the requirements of a **marriage** proposal. (See **Amos 2**, where God refers to Himself as Israel's **husband**.)

When Moses returns to the camp and relays God's proposal to them, they all respond with a resounding, "**We will!**"

Epistle Lesson: Romans 5: 6-15

St. Paul is in the midst of a treatise on **faith**. Earlier in this chapter, St. Paul explained that the **grace** of God that **saves** us is accessed through **faith** in our Lord Jesus Christ. Then he notes that we should **rejoice** in our current suffering,

because **suffering** produces endurance, **endurance** produces character, **character** produces hope, and **hope** does not put us to shame before God. Today's lesson then picks up with the observation that God demonstrated his unfathomable **love** for us by dying for us when we were an **abomination** in His sight. Consequently, St. Paul assures us, God will **continue** to love us **even more** now that we are **reconciled** to Him.

Finally, St. Paul notes that through the **sin** of one man, **Adam**, sin and consequent death infected **all** of mankind. On the other hand, by the **death** of one **sinless** person, Jesus, the **second Adam**, **any person** accessing God's grace through **faith** is born again into the second Adam's race.

Gospel Lesson: Matthew 9: 35 - 10: 8 (9-20)

Similarly to the Old Testament reading, a lot has happened since Jesus started his ministry. He preached the **Sermon on the Mount**, cleansed a **leper**, healed a Centurion's **servant**, healed Peter's **mother-in-law**, cast out **demons**, calmed a **storm**, healed a **paralytic**, raised a young girl from the **dead**, healed a **blind** man, and healed a man unable to **speak**.

Our lesson for today starts with a concise summary of Jesus' ministry:

- He taught and proclaimed the **Gospel of the Kingdom**; and
- he healed **every** disease and affliction.

And what **motivated** Jesus? He had **compassion** on the people, for they were like sheep **without** a shepherd, looking for a **deliverer**. That is why Jesus could say to his disciples that the harvest was **ripe** for harvesting, but there were not **enough** laborers to get the job done.

Consequently, Jesus calls twelve of his disciples and makes them his apostles. He then sends them out with the following commands:

- Go to the lost sheep of Israel.
- Proclaim that the **Kingdom of Heaven** is at hand.
- Heal the **sick**.
- Raise the **dead**.
- Cast out **demons**.

Sunday on June 19 - 25 (Proper 7)

Old Testament Lesson: Jeremiah 20: 7-13

You may recall that Jeremiah was one of God's prophets to the **Southern** Kingdom during the last 35 years or so of its existence, **before** its people went into Babylonian captivity. His calls to repentance met with **hostility** from the inhabitants of Jerusalem and Judah, including its secular **and** religious leaders. Thus he was most familiar with **persecution** throughout his ministry. In fact, as we start our reading for today, we find Jeremiah just being released from prison after a severe **beating** because he had prophesied the coming **disaster** on Jerusalem and Judah. His words are words of **distress**, because he apparently had thought that, since he was speaking the words that **God** gave him, God would **protect** him. Yet he cannot **snuff out** the words that God has put **within** him to speak, so his listeners still seek to do **evil** to him. But then Jeremiah remembers that when people **persecute him**, they are actually persecuting **God**, and God will take **vengeance**. **This** thought then results in **praise** to God from Jeremiah.

Epistle Lesson: Romans 6: 12-23

St. Paul points out to the Romans (and **us!**) that since we have been raised from the **dead** by the death and **resurrection** of Christ, we have been **freed** from our slavery to **sin**. Therefore we are to **resist** every temptation to sin, thereby presenting ourselves to God as an instrument for **righteousness**. And we certainly are **not** to use the argument that, since **grace** covers our sins, we can **sin away** because grace will continue to cover those sins. He then reminds us that the wages of **sin** is **death**; but the free **gift** of God through Jesus Christ is **eternal life**. We still have a **choice** as to whom we will **obey!**

Gospel Lesson: Matthew 10: 5a, 21-33

Jesus here gives some wise **advice** regarding persecution for **His** sake. His warns first of all that **when** persecution comes, we will be **hated** by **everybody**, and that even members of **our own household** may turn against us or even **betray** us. After all, if **Jesus** was persecuted, we **certainly** will be persecuted. But when persecution **comes**, we should be prepared to **flee**. Our job still is to **share** the good news of the kingdom.

But then He notes that we should not **fear** our persecutors, because, all they can do is kill the **body**. If we **deny** Jesus, then we will face God who can destroy both **soul and body** in hell. Rather, we should **trust** that God is **fully aware** of our circumstances, and that He has our **reward** waiting for us in Heaven.

Sunday on June 26 - July 2 (Proper 8)

Old Testament Lesson: Jeremiah 28: 5-9

Continuing from last week the saga of the prophet Jeremiah, we find that the King of Babylon had **already** raided Jerusalem and taken **booty** as well as **officials** captive. In the preceding chapter, Jeremiah had **prophesied** the fall of the kingdoms of Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre, Sidon, and Judah to King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. He further warned these nations that if they **opposed** the King of Babylon, God would punish that nation with war, famine, and pestilence. Consequently, Jeremiah warned, do **not** listen to the false prophets, diviners, dreamers, fortune-tellers, or sorcerers who are saying, **“Peace, peace.”**

But Hananiah, a **false** prophet, rose up against Jeremiah, saying that God had told **him** that **Babylon** would fall within 2 years, with the return of the captives. It is at this point that our reading for today begins. Jeremiah says that he hopes that what Hananiah said **would** come true. **But** the history of **God’s** prophets was that they preached **war, famine, and pestilence** if the people did **not** obey God. If however a prophet prophesied **peace**, then only when that peace came to **pass** would people know that that prophet actually spoke for **God**.

Epistle Lesson: Romans 7: 1-13

In today’s lesson, St. Paul continues his discussion of the significance of the death and resurrection of Jesus. He starts the discussion with the example of marriage: under the **Law**, a woman is bound to her husband until his death, and then **only** is she free to marry someone else. Similarly, when Jesus died and was resurrected, believers **died** and were resurrected **with** him, so that the Law no longer **applies** to them. In other words, we died while a slave to sin; once **dead**, we are no **longer** a slave to sin. But since we were resurrected with **Christ**, we are now able to live our life **dedicated** to Christ through a **Spirit-led** life. And **that** explains the process of being **born again!**

St. Paul then asks: what was the **benefit** of the Law in the first place? Well, it **did** promise life to those who could keep it. But since that was **not** the case, what it **did** do is **show** us how **sinful** we really were. So it was not the **Law** that was bad; it, in fact, was **good!** But when our sinful nature heard the commands to **not** do this or that, that is exactly what we **did**. Just like when we are told **not** to think of a **pink elephant**,* that is exactly what we think of immediately. So when we **disobeyed** the commandment, we sinned, and it was that **sin** that produced death.

**Many thanks to Pastor Nicholas Ittzes for providing this example.*

Gospel Lesson: Matthew 10: 34-42

St. Matthew continues from last week his recording of Jesus' words regarding **persecution of Christians** because of their witness. Jesus' notes that one's faith will bring **discord and hostility** even between **family** members. And one's **worst** enemy might well be someone of your own **household!** But then Jesus reminds us that we must make **choices**. In order to have **peace**, will you give up your **faith** in order to appease someone else? Or will you give up your faith because of threatened **persecution**—which could be physical, psychological, mental, financial, emotional, or professional? Or will you give up your faith in order to keep your **lifestyle**? Jesus warns that whoever thinks that giving up one's **faith** will continue to give you the life you **desire** will actually result in your **losing** eternal life.

Then Jesus lists how believers can receive rewards:

- By receiving **Jesus**, you receive the Father.
- By receiving **you**—the **messenger** of Jesus, that **other** person receives Jesus.
- By receiving a **true prophet**, you receive a true prophet's **reward**.
- By receiving a **righteous** person, you receive a **righteous** person's reward.
- And, if you give even just a cup of cold water to a child **because he is a Christian**, you will **certainly** not lose your reward.