

First Friends Church, a Quaker Meeting
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Everything Included: One Big Covenant
Hosea 2:14-23

Reading

Therefore, I will now allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her. From there I will give her her vineyards, and make the Valley of Achor a door of hope. There she shall respond as in the days of her youth, as at the time when she came out of the land of Egypt. On that day, says the LORD, you will call me, "My husband," and no longer will you call me, "My Baal." For I will remove the names of the Baals from her mouth, and they shall be mentioned by name no more. I will make for you a covenant on that day with the wild animals, the birds of the air, and the creeping things of the ground; and I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land; and I will make you lie down in safety. And I will take you for my wife forever; I will take you for my wife in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love, and in mercy. I will take you for my wife in faithfulness; and you shall know the LORD. On that day I will answer, says the LORD, I will answer the heavens and they shall answer the earth; and the earth shall answer the grain, the wine, and the oil, and they shall answer Jezreel; and I will sow him for myself in the land. And I will have pity on Lo-ruhamah, and I will say to Lo-ammi, "You are my people"; and he shall say, "You are my God."

Message

The prophet Hosea is not well-known to Christians because we seldom get to hear from him. He is the only prophet we have from his time period- the 8th Century BCE. St. Augustine named him one of the twelve Minor Prophets not because his message is minor but because his book is short. Characterized as a "prophet of doom," his true message is actually one of abundant faithfulness, love and restoration.¹

Though he was a prophet for over sixty years his writings were not compiled until centuries after they were written. Yet the compilers show editorial genius because they use his salacious allegory to draw you in. Once you are hooked, you

¹ Wikipedia, Hosea 2/23/21.

see clearly what appeared to be a personal story is really about the relationship between God and God's people.

Hosea says he was commanded by God to marry a prostitute (Gomer) and name his children Lo-ruhamah- "unloved" and Lo-ammi- "not my people." The dysfunctional family drama grabs the reader's attention but its' true purpose is to express separation and grief. We know this because the remaining 13 chapters repeat the same message in poetic but not salacious terms. God's people are unfaithful and suffer severe consequences from their choice to follow false gods.

But there is a solution and tellingly Hosea's name means salvation. He says God loves the people, mourns the consequences of their choices, forgives and saves them. Rather than foretelling disaster, (the people are already separated from their God) Hosea laments the broken relationship and holds out hope.

Hosea shows God loving God's people; showing adoration through abundant gifts of the earth and life. "I will win back my beloved with words of love. I will give back the vineyards and make Trouble Valley a door of hope... I will make a covenant with all the wild animals and birds... I will remove all weapons of war from the land... so they can live in peace and safety... I will be true and faithful; I will show constant love and mercy ... forever... I will keep my promise... I will answer prayers... make rain fall on the earth, and the earth will produce grain and

grapes and olives. I will show love to those who were called “Unloved” and “Not-My-People.” I will say, “You are my people.”²

The important note is God takes the initiative. The good news of Hosea and in fact the entire message of the Bible can be summed up in this message. God seeks relationship with us first. God calls and lures us continually into love, life and Light; even if we are off chasing other gods, whatever those “gods” might be.

I could stop there. That’s enough of a message really- What gods are you off chasing? Do you hear God calling and luring? How will you respond?

But I was lured into this passage by the word covenant. We know God had a covenant with the people starting with Abraham millennia before Hosea was born. Now covenant is often mistaken as a synonym for contract. That is a misnomer.

A contract requires two parties to make, break, and keep it, and each must get something from it in order to make it valid. Each party agrees outside authorities can enforce it. Penalties are paid to the injured by the one who breaks it.

A covenant is similar only in that it is entered into willingly. But it is mutually satisfying rather than binding. It looks to the benefit of the other not to its own. It is not something you enter with the question, “What will I get out of this? But what am I willing to give, how will we experience more harmony, peace and

² Good News translation, adapted.

create something better together? You don't ask what fences and boundaries do we agree will not be traversed, but how will we grow and be interdependent?

In the Bible we see that the covenant with God begins because God wants relationship, sharing and interaction with us. There is no outside authority to enforce it. God never breaks it, only humans do, and we never pay God for the injury. God offers a covenant of love that is not coercive but relational and wants the best for the beloved, always. God stays in covenant even if we don't, and the only recourse to a broken covenant is not enforcement but forgiveness and love.

Clearly if God had a contract with God's people they broke it. They should have been found guilty of breaking it and required to pay damages. Instead they and we have a covenant that exists even when they were unfaithful and we do not participate. But it can always be restored and renewed. We see this as Hosea expresses all the forgiveness, love and abundant life God offers. Instead of humans being required to apologize or pay restitution, he ends with, "Then they will say, 'You are my God.'" This is not a faith statement, acknowledgement of a Lordship or expression of submission to power. It is a loving claim, just as God says the people are God's beloved, so we claim God as our beloved.

But there is a second point about covenant. Hosea tells us God expanded it. God says, "I will make for you a covenant on that day with the wild animals, the birds of the air, and the creeping things of the ground and I will answer the heavens

and they shall answer the earth; and the earth shall answer the grain, the wine, and the oil.” To me this said God is putting it all in. Everything in the heavens and on the earth- all of the multiverse of creation is in covenant together with God and us.

In a recent devotion Matthew Fox reflected on Howard Thurmon. “Thurmon says: ‘The profoundest disclosure in the religious experience is the awareness that the individual is not alone... The individual absorbs what all others absorb. Experience is personal, private, but in no sense exclusive. All of the vision of God and holiness which is experienced must be achieved in the context of the social situation by which day-by-day life is defined. What we discover...we must “define” or act upon in community.’

But Thurman reminds us that community is not just the human community. The individual must have a kinship to life that goes beyond ... to feel belonging in the total environment. The kinship with all of life defines us as a human being. As a human being then, one belongs to life and the whole kingdom of life that includes all that lives and perhaps, also, all that has ever lived. In other words, see oneself as part of a continuing breathing, living existence. To be a human being, then, is to be essentially alive in a living world. Thurman strikes an essential paradox: even though we are individual human beings, we must seek a ‘sense of kinship to life’ that transcends all particulars.”³

³ [DailyMeditations] 02/24/21: Howard Thurman on the Individual, Community, and Kinship with LifeAdapted from Matthew Fox, *Christian Mystics: 365 Readings and Meditations*, 211, 209, 210.

A covenantal relationship rests on shared commitment to ideas, issues values, and goals. God's relationship with us is covenantal. It rests on the love God first showed us and all of creation; love God has never and will never withdraw no matter whether we honor the covenant with God, ourselves, others or creation. It is a covenant that cannot be broken because God is abundantly faithful.

If we say God is our God we join in this covenant- the whole covenant. All in because God put it all in; everything in the heavens and on the earth- all of the multiverse of creation. How are we led to keep this covenant for the benefit of the other and not our own? What are we willing to give to grow and experience more harmony, peace and create something better together?