

Sunday 25th July 2004, Eighth Sunday after Pentecost Rob Lamerton

Readings:

- Hosea 1: 2-10
- Psalm 85
- Colossians 2: 6-15 (16-19)
- Luke 11.1-13

The first reading from Hosea depicts the disastrous relationship between Hosea and his wife Gomer and the names of her offspring:
looks back to Jehu's destruction of Ahab and forward to restoration ---

1. Jezreel - meaning God sows Judgement and Restoration
BUT
2. Lo-ruhama --- not pitied
3. Lo-ammi --- not my people

There is an indication with Jezreel that the relationship was once O.K. and will be again... but that Gomer's lack of faithfulness has led to
not pitied
not my people.

The relationship is symbolic of God's relationship with the people of Israel --- a relationship which was once strong has now fallen apart because God's people (4 kings) have lost control and come under the threat of Assyrian domination eventually to be overthrown by Assyrian forces.

Instead of being faithful to the Creator God, Israel has entered into relationship with the Canaanite religious practice which included immoral fertility rites.

So as we read this story the historical context helps us understand the story's language:

1. It is about God and God's people and traditionally God = husband and Israel = wife so it is the wife who gets the bad press.

I wonder with more modern images of the feminine aspects of God and understanding about males if the story would be told the same way today....

It also reminds us that marriage --- indeed all relationships --- are sacramental --- meant to express the nature of God. Sadly in reality we often fail --- but the ideal is there!

We are called into faithful relationship with God.

Offspring

God sows judgement and restoration

Are pitied

Are God's people

The plant growth image is also used by Paul in describing how we are to have our roots firmly embedded in Christ.

and whereas the ancient peoples of God

worshipped fake gods

allowed national life to fall apart

and allowed a greater power to dictate terms.

The Christian believer cannot.

"See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit."

Don't let the old ways hold you captive!

Well that seems to me to be the hard part!

It is so easy to hold onto old habits... ways... faults... prejudices... traditions...

But we are to grow into a body of which Christ is the head --- the thinking ... [*directing*]

Now that is easy to say --- difficult to do.

And it is not a quick and easy process.

That is where we come to the gospel --- PRAYER

1. Jesus is praying
 2. There is an indication that John the Baptist taught about prayer
 3. The disciples seek some teaching on prayer
 4. Jesus gives them these prayer points
- Father - hallowed be your name
--- recognize God's holiness
 - Your kingdom come
--- we seek God's reign in us and our world.
 - Give us each day our daily bread
--- enough for the day/for the day's journey
 - Forgive us our sins.
 - For we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us.
 - And do not bring us to the time of trial
we pray for deliverance in difficult times and in the most difficult time as we draw near to the end.

And Jesus tells a story to describe the need for persistent prayer which is of course at the heart of a relationship of faithfulness.

Any relationship requires communication; talking and listening --- so too with God.

And the best way to learn to Pray is

DO IT!

[talking to a woman this week who in her busy life in her office/storeroom spends time at special hours of the day...]

Have a time and place

You might begin with the Lord's Prayer

thinking about each line

then simply list the issues, people, events of concern and what you are looking for

leave some space.

Pray the Lord's Prayer again.

OR use a prayer book APBA or others....

The second part of the Gospel story is also about persistence

- ASK
- SEEK
- KNOCK

keep knocking on God's door because God knows our need.

If we know what is good for our children

HOW MUCH MORE does God know our need and gives, not practical things, but the Holy Spirit.

God gives first of all the

- Spirit of Love
- Spirit of Relationship
- Spirit of Understanding
- Spirit of Insight

and in fact if we start looking around we discover that in God's providence our prayers are indeed answered as we are asking.