

Wm. Blake Spencer

Come Home!

Hosea 11: 1-11

Meditation before Worship:

"It occurred to me that this time in this house, in this city and state in which, to my surprise, I've been consciously happy, it wasn't enough just to slap a new layer of paint on the walls. For the first time ever, I felt ready to reverse the process – to strip away the surface and dig in. I wanted to belong here. You can't claim a history you don't have, but maybe you can reclaim one. And if I did, I might finally come close to touching what's eluded me all these years: continuity, connectedness, permanence." (James Morgan; If These Walls Had Ears by James Morgan; pXX)

Prayer of Confession: (quote: James Morgan, p100)

Holy God we acknowledge that...

"Home is a fragile ecosystem. One person's dark mood can suck the sunlight out of a room. An icy stare can steal a house's heat. It's part of what makes the concept of family – a group of angst-ridden individuals living together under one roof – almost laughably difficult. In the midst of that hothouse jungle, most of us think and act as individuals, rather than putting the family above ourselves so it can have what it needs to flourish. Once the precarious balance is out of whack, then blooms fade. Roots wither."

Invite us again out of the walls of isolation into the communion of your body, O Christ. Heal us and make us whole. Amen.

Words of Assurance: (quote: Macrina Wiederkehr; A Tree Full of Angels; p3)

"What is home but that place where your name becomes precious...You find power when you are at home because it is there that you are loved, cherished and accepted just as you are, with all your frailty, fears and flaws. It is there in that lovely dwelling place called home that you discover you don't have to be perfect to be loved...you don't have to be finished to be good. You don't have to be finished to see splendor."

What is home but that place where forgiveness stands at the door, peers out the window, and rushes down the steps to meet you.

Hear the Good News!
In Jesus Christ, we are forgiven!

Sermon:

How many times in life have you and I come to a moment when we have had to admit to ourselves and even perhaps to someone else that we are at the end of our rope....that things aren't going the way we expected them to go....that we had other expectations and hopes and dreams and intentions....and for some reasons....and....ok.... for some really specific reasons it just isn't working out.

These are those moments when some sort of decision must be made....a plan of action put into play....that moment when all else fails you just have to get up and do something

different...because living the same thing over and over again leaves very little room for nothing else but what has been....and when "what has been" is not longer a viable option then the only thing left to do is pick up and move on.

And that is exactly what he did. He was at the end of his rope. Having tried every available option to get life just the way he thought it should be.....he took matters into his own hands....and he had the tools to make it happen.

The first thing he grabbed was his suitcase.

My best friend gave my son his first suitcase. Wayde was five years old at the time and he loved that little zippered, Can You Find Waldo, themed suitcase. He constantly carried his most treasured possessions in it.

And then on one particular Saturday afternoon when Wayde had had all he could take of his parents and their insistence that he behave as if he were a human being...he stomped upstairs with the drama of a Broadway play.

It didn't take him long to gather all the necessary items before he made his big announcement. We pretended not to notice as he stomped from one corner of the house to the next.....

and our non-plussed response made him angrier.

Eventually he stood at the front door. Before turning the doorknob he looked us in the eye and yelled, "I'm running away!"

"I'm sorry. What did you say?" His face now the color of a red pepper, the kind they use in Cajun gumbo to make you remember into next week what you ate.

Oh, he was hot....and he yelled again. "I'm running away."

"Oh, ok. Where are you going?" we asked. "Away....that's all."

"When will you be back?" "Not for a really, really long time", he snarled.

Oh what a scene. A number of folks were walking by our house when Wayde's great exit kicked into full gear. It was better than t.v. and they hung around the front sidewalk to watch the story play out.

There was a little alleyway on the side of our house and that's the route Wayde took.

It was one of those Brady Bunch moments. We all waved good-bye and wished him well. Even those on the side walk joined in on the bon voyage!

I went back in the house. Really I ran through the house to get outside on to the back patio where I could get a better view of Wayde's exodus into a new land of promise.

It was a rather pitiful scene. His head hanging down....but his short stocky legs in a determined stride... making his way into a life of his own making.....and for a moment I thought he just might succeed.

Thousands of years before my son packed his little zip up suitcase....another part of our family was up to the very same thing. It seems this particular story repeats again and again from one generation to the next.

We get complacent, sometimes bored, sometimes restless.... so we take matters in our own hands believing no one else understands. We take matters in our own hands even when the cost is bigger than we imagine.

The book of Hosea tells this story. It's a family story....one that we don't tell that often....because it is a family story revealing the warts and all.

I suppose we don't tell this story fearing that if we do, the warts and all in our lives might come to the surface and we don't much care for that. We don't like others to encounter those chapters of our story.

But, if we shy away from this Hosea story then we miss some deeply beautiful images of God.....parts of God's story we need not ever forget.

Hosea shows us two insights into God's nature. Part of the story God is portrayed as a faithful spouse. The verses we encounter today....reveal God as a parent.

Interestingly the original ancient language of Hosea does not designate God as a Father or as a Mother....but simply as Parent. The emphasis here is that God does not operate under human laws and is not restricted by the human point of view.

So it is clear..... God, the Holy one is in the midst of this family....this people. "I am who I am.....and in this moment, in this space, I am your parent and I love you in ways you cannot fully know."

As a good parent, God has expectations and hopes for all the children. And when things don't go the way God expects.....

well the disappointment of a parent becomes evident.....

especially when the child, when the children push the limits of patience.....

especially when the child, when the children will not turn from their own way....even when it takes them to edge of darkness.

We're familiar with these kinds of stories on the edge. We all know them. Teenage rebellion, mid-life crisis, divorce, substance abuse, infidelity, over eating, prejudice, family feuds, frivolous spending.

It's a Reality Show, at times out of control.....a reality we would rather not be part of.....because it's all too messy....and messy is scary.....and messy sometimes hurts.

And when we are the one who has been wronged....we have a great deal to say about it especially when the cooking pot has blown off its top.

It is our right to have our say, we say.

It is our right.

And speak we do....demanding justice

And growing very impatient when justice is not exercised in a timely manner.

Interestingly though....when it is God the parent who has been wronged by us the children....our tune for justice becomes fuzzy. We don't like admitting we've wronged God or others. We don't cherish the thought of God being put out with us. We can't fathom God standing at the door with a suitcase in hand ready to yell, I've had it....I'm leaving.

But scriptures tell this story again and again of God's struggle with us, of God wondering what to do with us....when we are so intent on going our own way.

And as much as some of us like to ignore these images...others in Christ's church can't get enough of God's readiness to squash us like a buzzing gnat...

But thankfully Hosea walks us through this messy story.....all the while revealing the full strength of God's emotion but not leaving us without hope. Hosea takes us right to the edge and from this vantage point we get a glimpse of God we never should forget.

In the eighth verse of chapter 11 it is as if God is running through the house to get to the back patio to peer over the fence and yell out so that we might hear and remember.

“How can I give you up? How can I hand you over? My heart swells within me...my compassion grows warm and tender. I will not act on my anger....

How can I give you up? I called you my child. I taught you to walk.”

And there on the back patio.....God stands pouring out love so rich and full....we can't help but lift up our head and turn back.

There on the back patio peering over the fence God calls out to us. “Remember the story. I was there. When you were weighed down in slavery crushing clay and straw into bricks to build Egypt into an empire of power and wealth I heard your cries.

I heard you yelling for freedom.

I did not turn from you. I heard your cries and I broke the bond of oppression and led you into freedom that you might live....filled with promise.

We waited as long as we could and then yelled out to our son. “Wayde please come back. We need to tell you something. Come back.”

He lifted his head and taking a few more steps he turned around and slowly started his way back.

We ran back through the house and waited on the front porch this time with our arms open and hollered for the whole neighborhood to hear, “Come home. We want you to come home. We need you to come home. Come home.”

In the midst of this awfully messy story in Hosea....we are left with this image. God with open arms waiting for us. Giving us space enough to come to terms with the hard things in our lives.....but not leaving us in the wasteland of our own making.

God standing on the front porch this time....calling out.

“Don't you remember.

I claimed you in the waters when I baptized you.

I washed you clean....I filled you up.

I freed you to be who I created you to be.”

Come for all is ready.

Come home.

Come home.

Benediction: “My son now has a son. He's not able to pick up and go his own way yet, but one day he will. One day my son will be standing on a front porch hollering out to his son, “Come home! I want you to come home. I need you to come home.” This is our story. We gather as a family each week to speak and remember the story God unfolds from one generation to the next. For indeed, God is on the front porch ready to welcome us home! Go now in the name of God the creator, redeemer and sustainer. Amen.”