

Sermon for 31 July 2022 @ Bethesda UMC/Baltimore  
Eighth Sunday after Pentecost

Scriptures: Hosea 11:1-11; Psalm 107:1-9, 43(UM830); Colossians 3:1-11;  
Luke 12:13-21

***“This and that”***

Does the Bible sometimes just STUN you? Today is one of those days, maybe. Out of this impulse to PROPHECY, that burst out among the Jews somewhere around the eighth century B.C., Hosea married a whore and had children with her who, today, turned out as bad as you'd expect ... and riding on his own experience of fatherhood came this image of God, furious at Israel's going after other gods, but at the same time knocked down by grief as a parent ... and vibrating there between discipline and forgiveness ... “but I was the one who taught you how to walk!” ..... “How can I give you up?” ... and then there's this trembling moment Jahweh vibrates, shakes, between justice ... like a parent not only rages, but knows, feels she must teach justice ... and suddenly trembles like we used to hear the airplanes on the base near my home in Texas, break the sound barrier with a roar and then speed off into the horizon and silence... and forgiveness takes over the Almighty ruler of the universe, and salvation becomes the last word, the center and truth about life, and the fundamental invitation to humankind to grow up and be truly alive.

“This and that,” I called it as I thought about the impact it has had, and believed it still has, on us worshipers and readers of scripture.

Both sides are real. I listened to another program on CNN this week, reflecting on the January 6 hearings, and a woman reflected powerfully when asked what the message was, with all these complaints about the hearing being one-sided and yet powerfully truthful, summing up when all these judges and lawyers asked her what it all meant .... They were all experts and it was rock-bottom honesty in its own fashion, and she said, “What it means is, when you're spending all your time and energy fighting lies, you haven't energy to hold the truth tight.” Those who heard her said, or at least one did, “Somehow, it came out so clear what was happening, how basic the point was that our whole history and character as a nation was being fundamentally threatened, and had been for the last couple of decades or so, that it was just shockingly possible to believe we can survive and rise above this high-voltage threat.. “ and I thought of Hosea's image of God and of Israel's unfaithfulness and the whole genius of our religious insight ... God, it's awesome what we're offered!

But it didn't let up. In the same news was the story and the photos of the Pope, in a wheelchair, coming to make a penitential pilgrimage across Canada, reaching out his hand to tribal representatives who have been storming the news with their historical evidence of the physical and mental

abuse of Indigenous children by not only Catholics, but Presbyterians and others who were dead set on tearing these young people out of their native traditions and homes and parental relationships .... And then the whole church doctrine (they called it the doctrine of discovery, concocted by the church fathers in the sixteenth century) of Christ being superior to native faith, and of Christianity turning that twisted outlook into colonial profit and domination and ... "This and that" again, with Christ perverted into a white savior and guardian of American and British and French and on-and-on superiority, in Africa and Cambodia and .... Dear God, what a panoply of domination and unhinging of the spirituality that should be redeeming and uniting and expanding upon all the glorious varieties of our physical and mental and sexual and intellectual gifts!

I haven't time to explore the rest of today's riches in Bible illustrations. Just a moment to allow the Colossians' insistence ... we're no longer sure Paul was the author, but certainly his influence is somewhere in that scenery, as the young church insists it is true in the deepest sense, giving ourselves to the best in group life among these newly-converted Jews and these Greeks and Spaniards and all sorts of European varieties, in their small cell groups and their rich connecting with older versions of spirituality, so that they truly did find you could go beyond selfishness and narrowness and explore the Spirit as they gave up fighting and dominating over one another.... And then the pungent tale of the farmer who wasn't a bad guy, just self-satisfied and sufficient in his protectionism ...and Jesus called him a fool, summing up what we know day by day and news report by news report: That private wealth is no security at all, compared to shared possessing and reaching out to others with less, over and over and always... and yet poverty is real and disgusting and who wants it?

Just this and that. Have I teased you into reading more daily scripture, and thinking on your own about what holiness really is, and what you want your children to learn, and how your heart never stops moving outward even as the hearts of others are forever reaching out to you, and how central this is to everything that lasts and binds together and rejuvenates our experience as humans? Have you been able to see this in the animals and the sunsets and the glories of nature that, God willing, we still have the wisdom to rejoice in and honor and preserve and use better than we have for so long these last couple of centuries?

Are you open to this and that? Can you take over and preach it better than I? Do it, now! Trust and obey! Stop being cynical or even discouraged. There's so much to celebrate, there are such important points to stay alive and make in this tiny section of time we are given.

Go for it!

In Jesus' name,

Amen.