

Willow River Parish: Clear Lake, Deer Park, and Faith Family

Title: How I Love You

Lesson: Hosea 11:1-11 NRSV

11 When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.

2 The more I called them, the more they went from me; they kept sacrificing to the Baals

and offering incense to idols. 3 Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk; I took them up in my arms, but they did not know that I healed them. 4 I led them with cords of human kindness, with bands of love. I was to them like those who lift infants to their cheeks. I bent down to them and fed them.

5 They shall return to the land of Egypt,

and Assyria shall be their king, because they have refused to return to me.

6 The sword rages in their cities; it consumes their oracle priests and devours because of their schemes. 7 My people are bent on turning away from me. To the Most High they call, but he does not raise them up at all. 8 How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, O Israel? How can I make you like Admah? How can I treat you like Zeboiim? My heart recoils within me; my compassion grows warm and tender.

9 I will not execute my fierce anger; I will not again destroy Ephraim, for I am God and no mortal, the Holy One in your midst, and I will not come in wrath.

10 They shall go after the LORD, who roars like a lion; when he roars, his children shall come trembling from the west. 11 They shall come trembling like birds from Egypt and like doves from the land of Assyria, and I will return them to their homes, says the LORD.

(Slide 1) The United Methodist Church follows John Wesley's theology, and Wesley saw the Christian faith should be revealed in Scripture, illuminated by tradition, vivified by experience, and confirmed by reason. We understand the Bible is the primary source for Christian spiritual life. Scripture testifies that God loved all of his creation. Our journey of faith without the Bible is unimaginable. Tradition is the history of humanity's journey of faith based on the Bible. And, our faith must be confirmed by reason. As the last one, Christian faith experience is personal but communal. This means that all Christians have a common experience of God, but those experiences are

personal, subjective, and varied. We call these four standards Wesleyan Quadrilateral.

(Slide 2) Today I'm going to talk about faith experience that belongs to the Wesleyan Quadrilateral. Many characters in the Bible have experiences about God. For example, when Moses stood before the burning bush on Mount Horeb, he experienced God so he had to take off his shoes and fell down. In Luke 5, also, Peter, who had experienced a miracle of fishing because of Jesus, came before the Lord, fell down, and said: "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man." (Luke 5:8)

As I mentioned, experience is personal and subjective. So, some people experience a great turning point in which their lives are completely changed by God, while others experience God's love and grace in their daily lives little by little. There is no better or lesser experience of faith because experiences are personal, subjective, and different for each person because God created us all special and unique. Look around. There is none like you. All of us have our own looks and personality. And because God meets us personally and individually, there is no right answer to our experience of faith. They are all diverse and different. So, your faith experiences deserve respect.

(Slide 3) In other words, each of us has a different image of God. For example, there is a sentence: "God is ...". How would you finish this sentence? "God is..." Some might say God is good. Some even say God is love. Some say God is great; God is holy; Some say God is near, some say God is tender.

The context of Hosea 11 is when the Israelites were being held captive in Assyria. The Book of Hosea was written by prophet Hosea and his faith experience and the image of God he had was like parents. Thus, the God in Hosea is described as parents.

(Slide 4) Regarding the liberation of Israel from Egypt, the Lord says, "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son." (1). In Hosea, God continued to say, "I loved him; I called them, I taught them to

walk; I took them up in my arms; I led them with cords of human kindness with bands of love; I fed them.”

However, his children, Israel, forgot the grace of their parents. As I read these verses, I reflected on a time when I lived with my parents, when I sometimes did the exact opposite of what they wanted. These days, as I raise my son, Evan, with my wife, Esther, I realize how my parents raised me and how much they loved me. Israel is like our adolescence period. God loved us like parents’ hearts, and supporters' care, but Israel did not obey God's will.

(Slide 5) There is a saying in Korea, “Bite any of the ten fingers and it will hurt the same.” Is it easy to understand that saying? A similar American saying is “The apple of my eye.” I think this is the heart of parents. Some children listen to their parents, while others disobey their parents. However, to parents, all of their children are equally precious and adorable. Hosea is saying that this is the heart of parents and God's love for us.

However, the Israelites forgot God's grace and love that led them to the Exodus, the wilderness, and a land flowing with milk and honey, so they betrayed God. After they arrived in Canaan, where they wanted, they began to worship idols, not God. In the Bible, however, it says very clearly that following personal greed and desires is a sin and evil.

However, serving God is different than serving idols. God nags us like parents. God asks us to live a righteous life, a life of love, a life of mercy, a life of humility, a life of following God's will. God continued to call the Israelites back to God through many prophets, but they turned away from God's voice. People who should worship God are worshipping idols. Eventually they will become Assyrian slaves just as they were Egyptian slaves. Because of this fact, God sighs and hesitates to punish Israel.

Israel has forsaken God, but God is still waiting for His children to return to Him, like a father waiting for his prodigal son who has left home, waiting for his repentance and restoration.

(Slide 6) Verse 8 shows God's love for his children like parents’ hearts and the supporters' hearts: “How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, O Israel? How can I make you like Admah? How can I treat you

like Zeboiim? My heart recoils within me; my compassion grows warm and tender.” One of the toughest things in the world is probably the parents who have to look at their sick children. In this situation, they would think, “I would rather be sick than my children.” Such was God's heart when he looked at Israel suffering as a slave of Assyria.

(Slide 7) Thus, God decided to forgive his people rather than punish them. He is determined to show them mercy and forgiveness. People punish and avenge others' sins, but He forgives and has mercy. Verse 9 says that “for I am God and no mortal, the Holy One in your midst, and I will not come in wrath.” The Holy God meets us in the midst of our life with love and forgiveness.

Whenever we pray the Lord's prayer, we pray that “Give us this day our daily bread.” God is the One who gives us our daily bread. This means that He is interested in our ordinary daily life, and He is in the midst of our daily life. Our God is deeply involved in our daily life and understands and knows all of our joys, sorrows, worries, and prayers, even before we share them with Him. Our Sunday worship service is an opportunity to meet God and is special, but our daily prayers form and build a deeper relationship with God, so we need to worship, praise, and pray to God as often as possible. Through this, we experience what being the children of God is and its preciousness and dignity. And, every day and each and every moment and in good time or bad time, when you are glad or when you are sad, try to remember that God loves you, calls you the child of God, encourages you, comforts you, and wants to bless you with good things. God is good all the time. Amen.