

St. Paul's July 29, 2007

A Reflection on Hosea 1:1-11, Psalm 85, Colossians 2:1-15, Luke 11:1-13.

Lord teach us to pray.

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This was week of much prayer for me. My very close friend and mentor was diagnosed with a malignant brain tumour and his community responded in prayer and support. So, I was reflecting on today's readings in amongst these times of prayer and visiting, sitting, talking, holding hands, supporting each other and praying for God's mercy. The Lord's Prayer echoed through all of this.

"One of his disciples said to him, Lord teach us to pray... and he said to them, "When you pray say: Father hallowed be your name, your Kingdom come." We might say, Mystery beyond our knowing, close to us as our breathing, in humble awe we pray¹. We pray for your vision of justice and mercy to be made real in our world. Where "Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss each other," where "Faithfulness will spring up from the ground, and righteousness will look down from the sky."

It is clear that we do not yet live in this vision of God's Kingdom here on earth, and neither did Hosea. He lived during a time of great chaos. There was political upheaval with numerous assassinations of kings who supported or did not support the invading Assyrian empire. For Hosea this crisis was all the result

¹ Inspiration from <http://liturgyoutside.net/CPr12.html>

of Israel's unfaithfulness to its covenant with God. He compared these times to a marriage where one of the partners is no longer faithful to the other. Israel had apparently incorporated or retained much of the Canaanite worship and Hosea saw this as infidelity to the One God. He said that the offspring of such "whoredom", to such infidelity (you see the depth and strength of his conviction) were the children Lo-Ruhamah, meaning No Mercy, and Lo-Ammi, meaning Not My People. Hosea's prophecy is that there will be no mercy for these unfaithful people, and they will not longer be God's people. But Hosea is so much in love with those to whom he preaches he cannot bring himself to leave it there. "Yet, the number of the children of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea,...And in the place where it was said to them, "You are not my people," it shall be said be said to them, "Children of the living God." Though Hosea prophesies dire consequences for Israel's unfaithfulness to its covenant with God, his ultimate vision is one of God's faithfulness and mercy. Well, this is the story of God and God's people writ large but what about the day to day, how does Hosea's vision of mercy and faithfulness manifest itself to us here and now.

How did it manifest itself to us as we few sat in the Chapel at the Infirmary and prayed, "Give us today our daily bread. We prayed for God's infinite gifts that sustain us each and every day. We prayed for the strength to see us through this, chaos, this crisis and for this one man whom we love dearly. It's hard to keep Hosea's visions in mind when faced with a crisis like this. What does it mean that God will always be faithful to us. What does it mean that God through God's self-giving mercy set aside all of our trespasses, our unfaithfulness, by nailing them to

the cross. How does it help us when we are faced with the suffering of a loved one, faced with the prospect of a world without this one person whom we love, who has shared our lives, and from whom we have learned so much? It seems at moments like these that Lo-Ruhama, the child - No Mercy is alive and well, that Lo-Ammi, the child, Not my people is among us. I think that if we lose our faith in the ultimate faithfulness and goodness of God then these children will live and multiply among us. No-mercy will rule and Not my people will overcome hope. But what Father among you, if his son asks for fish will instead of fish give him a serpent; or if he asks for an egg will give him a scorpion. If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask?

We prayed, "Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." We prayed for the grace to let go of that which is death dealing and to be able to embrace your vision of life. We prayed for the strength to resist the temptation of losing faith in God's ultimate and faithful goodness when we are faced with the unknown and frightening reality of a loved ones death. We prayed for that vision where, "Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss each other." We prayed for strength and guidance for all of those who have been given the skills and powers to heal sickness, we prayed for inner strength for all those who fear the loss of their loved one. We prayed in the faith of God's ultimate and everlasting goodness to us. We prayed for the healing and life of our friend, father, brother, and husband.

As we sat and prayed in the Chapel and he sat among us in his wheelchair, he raised his hands and said. "We have to sing a hymn at the start of our service." We sang "Sing a new song unto the Lord." Well the organ squeaked and gurgled and didn't quite make the sounds we expected, but we sure did! We sang that song truly as a new song unto the Lord. We don't know what the future will hold for our friend, whether he will be healed in body or not. We don't know how our lives together will unfold over the next days and perhaps months. We can only keep our faith that God through God's grace-filled faithfulness to us will sustain us, and strengthen us, and carry us throughout it all. We prayed, Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed by your name, Thanks be to God.