

Sunday Sermon August 3, 2025

I love the verse that we just heard in the Letter to the Colossians: “set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.” If you’re going to take one thing home from tonight’s/today’s service, take that home. This line is marvelous summary of what both the prophet Hosea and Jesus are telling us in the first reading and in the Gospel.

The passage from Hosea paints a beautiful, poetic, love story. The story of God’s love for God’s people. Depicting Israel as a beloved child, Hosea talks about how God gathers God’s people in God’s arms, like a mother scooping up her toddler. God “leads them with cords of human kindness and bands of love,” lifting them, like an infant, to the cheek. Tender and intimate.

Bending down. Feeding them. “My heart recoils within me,” God says. “My compassion grows warm and tender.” “I will return them to their homes.” I will bless them.

God is close. God is connected. God cares. Hosea paints a picture of God as compassionate, merciful and generous. He lifts up God’s tender loving care, God’s faithfulness. Even though God’s people have lost their way.

Hosea was writing in the 8th century BC. Interestingly, this was a relatively peaceful and prosperous time. But in spite of the goodness that has been bestowed upon them, God’s people are worshipping false God’s. They have gone astray, pursuing the things of this world rather than the things of God. One of the scholars I read noted that Hoseas confronted “an escalation of reckless political intriguing.”

Did their prosperity cause them to lose their way, to forget God and God’s goodness, and to fight about earthly things?

Instead of remembering the depth of God’s goodness and love and being grateful for their blessings, the people had chosen to focus on “the things of this earth” -false gods- and enriching themselves at the expense of others.

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That's also advice the rich man in Jesus' parable could have used. It's a powerful parable with many things to note. It says: "the land of a rich man produced abundantly."

Notice two things there: He was already rich, and then he hit the jackpot. His barns were already full, and the land – the land – had produced abundantly. Notice that: the land produced the abundance, not the rich man.

But he thinks it's all about him. He goes into an internal monologue – we might wonder if he has anyone to talk to. He says "I" and "my" eleven times in three short sentences. It's all about him. But it was the land that produces abundantly.

God provided the soil and the seeds. The sunshine and the rain were gifts of God. That the crops were free of locusts and other pests was a blessing. Workers tilled the soil, planted the seeds, cultivated and gathered the harvest. The knowledge about how to plant and harvest came from someone else.

The rich man thought it was all about him, but it was really all about God and God's blessings. Just like the people of Hosea's time, the rich man had forgotten God and God's goodness, compassion and tender loving care. He had put himself at the center. He lacked gratitude for the blessing of the harvest, and so his impulse was to store up for himself rather than to share the abundance.

Tragically, he thought that his earthly riches would satisfy his soul, but he quickly learned that he couldn't take it with him.

"Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth."

The key to the spiritual life – to being "connected to God with bands of love" – is gratitude. The people of Hosea's time needed to be reminded about God's faithfulness and love, because they had forgotten and turned away. The rich man didn't see his blessings as a gift from God, and so he lived selfishly and died poor and alone, having forgotten Jesus' admonition to "store up for yourselves treasures in heaven..." (Mt. 6:20)

Our readings today remind us that we live in two worlds: the material world and the spiritual world. The material world is things that are passing away. “Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust.”

The spiritual world, however, lasts forever. Spiritual things: compassion, generosity, forgiveness, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness and of course, love last forever. These are the things that satisfy the soul.

Mother Teresa often told this story. I’ll conclude with it today. She said: “some time ago a man came to our house and said, ‘Mother, there is a Hindu family that has eight children. They have not eaten for a long time. Do something for them.’

So I took some rice and went. When I arrived at their house, I could see the hunger in the children’s eyes. Their eyes were shining with hunger. I gave the rice to the mother. She took it and divided it in two, and then she went out. When she came back, I asked her, ‘where did you go?’ She said, “they are hungry also.” Her neighbors were also hungry.

Mother Theresa said: “What struck me most was not that she gave the rice but that she knew they were hungry. Because she knew, she shared. I did not bring more rice that night. I waited until the next morning so that they could experience the joy of sharing and loving.”

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Amen