

# Nurture

Some thoughts on God our Father

Hosea 11, Luke 2: 41-52

Rev. Dr. Dawn Jeffers Ramstad

Hudson United Methodist Church

31 July 2022



Thinking about our scripture for this week, I kept being pulled from them to one story in Jesus' life. He was twelve years old and went to the Temple in Jerusalem. We find it in Luke 2: 41-47.

Every year Jesus' parents traveled to Jerusalem for the Feast of Passover. When he was twelve years old, they went up as they always did for the Feast. When it was over and they left for home, the child Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents didn't know it. Thinking he was somewhere in the company of pilgrims, they journeyed for a whole day and then began looking for him among relatives and neighbors. When they didn't find him, they went back to Jerusalem looking for him.

The next day they found him in the Temple seated among the teachers, listening to them and asking questions. The teachers were all quite taken with him, impressed with the sharpness of his answers. (The Message)

I have always wondered which Scriptures Jesus and the Elders discussed. Their gathering was a small glimpse of the synagogue movement in Jesus' mortal lifetime, reminding us how men met to read and discuss Scripture. I think today's passage from Hosea 11 could have been an interesting choice. Jesus could be sharing his thought that God is our father just as Joseph and Mary frantically found Jesus.

Hosea lived his life in Jerusalem. He worshipped in Solomon's temple, where he very well could have had discussions with other teachers in the Temple courtyard, just as Jesus did when he worried his parents so much. Perhaps the inspiration for our assigned reading today came from such a conversation. Our passage from Hosea shares God's thoughts as though God were the father and Israel was a twelve year old son. As we read it, we quickly realize the words are God's, flowing through Hosea's pen. While I encourage you to read the entire passage, here are the verses where God describes himself as a father.

- 1 When Israel was a child, I loved him,  
and out of Egypt I called my son.
- 2 The more I called them,  
the further they went from me;  
they kept sacrificing to the Baals,  
and they burned 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 bands of human kindness,  
with cords of love.  
I treated them like those  
who lift infants to their cheeks;  
I bent down to them and fed them. . .
- 7 My people are bent on turning away from me;  
and though they cry out to the Most High,  
he will not raise them up.
- 8 How can I give you up, Ephraim?  
How can I hand you over, Israel?  
. . . My heart winces within me;  
my compassion grows warm and tender.
- 9 I won't act on the heat of my anger;  
I won't return to destroy Ephraim;  
for I am God and not a human being,  
the holy one in your midst;  
I won't come in harsh judgment. (Hosea 11, CEB<sup>ii</sup>)

Can you imagine Jesus discussing this passage in the Temple with the elders while Joseph was looking for his lost son; his son by adoption, a son he knew he

shared with God? That friends, in Joseph's question to young Jesus is the same voice of God we hear in Hosea, the loving father of a rebellious teen.

When Jesus became a man and then a rabbi, he taught all of us who follow him to pray, "Our Father, . . . Thy will be done on earth. . . ." (Matthew 6: 9,10)

There are two ways we can take this insight about God's nature and be true to our two sermons from Hosea. We could focus on our sin as humans, but since we did that at length last week and our primary congregation is made of teens and former teens, I will encourage you to either read that sermon on our web page<sup>iii</sup> or watch it on our YouTube channel (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vM7x2SmeMDc>).

Or we could focus more keenly on this idea of imitating God our Father when those we love are acting like rebellious adolescents, even if they are closer to age 80 than they are 18. That's where I my thinking went since I first read this week's commentary by Daniel Wolpert in this years *Disciplines: A Daily Book of Devotions 2022*.<sup>iv</sup> Wolpert first acknowledged that all humans talk to themselves. Some of us do it more, some of us do it less, but we all do talk to ourselves. Sometimes these thoughts are not healthy. "(Other times) they lead to life-giving action or reorient (one's) heart and mind in a helpful direction."<sup>v</sup> By considering Hosea's words meeting his own life, Wolpert caught and shared a glimpse of God, our Father, doing the same thing about human rebellion. We are created in God's image, not God in ours. When we mull things over before behaving badly, we imitate God.

So how does that work when what we are upset with our rebellious child, our spouse, or our parent? Wolpert wrote, "Those of us who are parents know these moments. Your child has just drawn on the wall with markers for the fourth time in as many days, and part of your internal conversation drifts toward the possibility of lots of yelling. But if we are coming from a place of grounded awareness, we don't give in to that impulse. And that's what God also decides . . ."<sup>vi</sup>

Rebellion is choosing our own path. As a boy, Jesus did that very thing when he stayed behind in the Temple rather than returning to Nazareth with his parents and the others with them. Neither God nor Joseph rejected Jesus. Nor did God reject Israel in Hosea's time before Jesus was born. Nor does God, our Father, reject us when we rebel. God may ruminate about us and our misbehavior, but God also said, "I am God and not a human being, the holy one in your midst; I won't come in harsh judgment." (Hosea 11:9)

If we descendants of Adam and Eve are God's children, it is only because God chose to adopt us with our human nature and nurture us with divine love. And our

adoption is our invitation to behave as members of God's family. As we imitate God nurturing us, we nurture each other with our responses, especially a person we love so much that we made a vow with them. The lovely thing about Hosea recording God's thoughts as though we were teens is that all of us have been teens with parents: biological, step, adopted, grand, foster—the list of types of parents is long. All our various parents have shaped our lives by how they nurtured us. In that extremely common ground of the parent-child relationship that we use our experience to think about how our behavior reflects God's nurture in our lives. How does being loved by God give us hope in hard times now as it did for Hosea and Jesus then?

Yesterday, I found an answer to that question in a Facebook post from my friend and former co-worker, Rev. Schuyler Rhodes. “This from brilliant writer and historian Howard Zinn. ‘To be hopeful in bad times is not just foolishly romantic. It is based on the fact that human history is a history not only cruelty, but also of compassion, sacrifice, courage, and kindness. What we choose to emphasize in this complex history will determine our lives. If we see only the worst, it destroys our capacity to do something. If we remember those times and places—and there are so many—where people have behaved magnificently, this gives us the energy to act, and at least the possibility of sending this spinning top of a world in a different direction.’”<sup>vii</sup>

“Compassion, sacrifice, courage, and kindness.” Do we not see these attributes in Hosea as we read God talking to himself about human rebellion? Do we not see these attributes in Jesus as he revealed himself to be the Christ, God's son as well as Mary's? Do we not hope for these attributes in others when we are at our worst? Are they not the very attributes we hope to find in ourselves as we seek to love each other?

May it be so as we imitate Jesus, our brother, who grew in both body and spirit blessed by both God and people. (Luke 2: 52).

Amen.

---

<sup>i</sup> Eugene Peterson, 1993. Copied and pasted from [www.biblegateway.com](http://www.biblegateway.com).

<sup>ii</sup> Common English Bible, 2011. Copied and pasted from [www.biblegateway.com](http://www.biblegateway.com).

<sup>iii</sup> [www.umchudson.org](http://www.umchudson.org)

<sup>iv</sup> Page 250, Upper Room Books, Nashville, 2021.

<sup>v</sup> Same as iv.

<sup>vi</sup> Same as iv.

<sup>vii</sup> From post on Rev. Schuyler Rhodes' personal Facebook page, 29 July 2022. Original source unknown.