



TOUCH POINT

Lord, You Want the Impossible! – Touchpoint for July 20, 2022

Hosea 1:2-10 (NRSVA) ² When the LORD first spoke through Hosea, the LORD said to Hosea, "Go, take for yourself a wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom, for the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the LORD." ³ So he went and took Gomer daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son.

⁴ And the LORD said to him, "Name him Jezreel; for in a little while I will punish the house of Jehu for the blood of Jezreel, and I will put an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel." ⁵ On that day I will break the bow of Israel in the valley of Jezreel."

⁶ She conceived again and bore a daughter. Then the LORD said to him, "Name her Lo-ruhamah, for I will no longer have pity on the house of Israel or forgive them." ⁷ But I will have pity on the house of Judah, and I will save them by the LORD their God; I will not save them by bow, or by sword, or by war, or by horses, or by horsemen."

⁸ When she had weaned Lo-ruhamah, she conceived and bore a son. ⁹ Then the LORD said, "Name him Lo-ammi, for you are not my people and I am not your God."

¹⁰ Yet the number of the people of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea, which can be neither measured nor numbered; and in the place where it was said to them, "You are not my people," it shall be said to them, "Children of the living God."

Grace and peace from the Mystery in whom we live and move and have our being.

When the Lord first spoke to Hosea he said:

"Go take for yourself a wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom..."

When I was growing up, my mom did a pretty good job of getting my brothers and I to church and Sunday school on a fairly regular basis. But, we were certainly nowhere near 100% attendance. And when I was attending confirmation classes at Shepherd of the Valley, I think I did a decent job of paying attention, but to say I was sitting on the edge of my seat, hanging on every word from Pastor Perry and Pastor Hamlin would not really be accurate. So, somewhere along the way, I think I missed this passage.

When the Lord first spoke to Hosea... When the Lord *FIRST* spoke to Hosea. I can't imagine how Hosea felt when the first words he hears from the Lord are, "Go take yourself a wife of whoredom." Given that it is believed Hosea was fairly affluent, from the correct side of the 8th century BC tracks, this must have been an incredible shock. He must have asked himself, "Did I hear that correctly? Could this be a mistake?" Or even, "This makes no sense, I am simply not going to do this." But instead, he does exactly what is asked of him. How difficult must it have been to blindly follow!

Thinking about Hosea and God's request of him, I started thinking about others who must have felt similarly. Others who, when God came to them with a direction that did not make sense, went forward. Abraham, Noah, David, to name a few. At some point Noah had to say, "You want me to build *WHAT?*" And David had to ask, "Has anyone bothered to look at the size of that guy?" And how difficult of a journey must Abraham have taken thinking he was about to sacrifice his son. Yet they all listened and did as God asked.

My mind then transitioned to people today who are called by God to do things that may not make sense, may be difficult, may create internal discomfort... Where are they? How do they answer the call? Do they

answer the call? Do they say, “*I don’t understand God... show me the way*”? Or do they say, “*That does not fit with my current schedule or agenda*”?

A couple of weeks ago I had the opportunity to sit down with Father Michael Lapsley, a man who certainly had reasons to ask, “*Why Me?*” and “*Is this really what you want from me, God?*”

For those of you who are not familiar with Father Michael, he is an Anglican priest originally from New Zealand and now living in Cape Town, South Africa, who in the mid 70’s became involved in the anti-Apartheid movement and was exiled from South Africa. In April of 1990, three months after Nelson Mandela was released from prison, Father Michael was at his desk opening a package of religious materials that he had received in the mail when the package exploded, causing him to lose both hands and the sight in one eye. He said, “*Quite early on after the bomb I realized that if I was filled with hatred and desire for revenge I’d be a victim forever.*” Instead of being driven by revenge and the need for retribution, he worked even more diligently to end the division that existed in South Africa and to heal the deep wounds that still exist today. At 73 years old, he oversees the Institute for Healing of Memories, which is working to reduce domestic violence in Africa, helping military veterans around the world deal with the traumas they experienced, and now working with health care workers and first responders in a post-COVID world. His mission remains to unite where there is division, to heal where there is brokenness. It seems whenever God has called, his only question is, “*What else can I do?*”

I left that meeting feeling inspired and hopeful. It is such an honor for Spirit in the Desert to be a partner with Healing of Memories and the outstanding work they continue to do.

The continued need for unity where there is division, and healing where there is brokenness, was never more apparent for me than ten days after my meeting with Father Michael, when I spent the morning at the Rwanda genocide memorial. I have to be honest and say that I knew very little about Rwanda as a country, and even less about the genocide. I did not understand the causes, the magnitude, and the timing of this atrocity. Pre-genocide Rwanda was a fairly peaceful, united country until outside influences began to divide the country based on random and arbitrary criteria. The primary point of division among the people was *how many cows do you own*. If you owned ten or more cattle, you were in one group and less than ten you were in another. Within a short amount of time, with the help of a controlled media, division led to distrust, and then hatred. When additional outside influences fanned the flames of hatred and then introduced a stockpile of weapons, this once-harmonious country spiraled into a frenzy. In April of 1994, over 1 million people were slaughtered in three months. Let me repeat that... over 1 million people were slaughtered in three months. These deaths were not caused by bombs or weapons of mass destruction, but rather by machetes and knives. The majority of these deaths were not caused by military or police, but by neighbor killing neighbor. Former friend killing friend. This happened only 28 years ago.

Today, Rwanda is healing and moving forward, united as one Rwanda. I can’t help wonder how many people had the opportunity to stop this, but for whatever reason, chose to do nothing. How many people, when God gave them a direction, chose to go another way. How many people said, “*God, that seems really hard.*” Or, “*God, that does not make sense to me, I think my way will be better.*” This tragedy could have been prevented at so many points along the way. It would not have taken thousands of people to stop this. A very few number of people created this, and a few people could have stopped it.

I think these words from Thich Nhat Hanh, in his book *Zen and the art of Saving the Planet*, summarize this better than I ...

And so, behind violence and killing is the idea that the other person is evil, that there is no goodness left in them. Our view is clouded by hatred. We believe the other side to be a villain. And yet that villain is only a view, an idea. In Buddhism, the sword of insight is, first of all, to cut off the view, the

label: in this case that a person or group of people is “evil.” These labels are dangerous. They have to be cut off. Views can only destroy human beings; they destroy love.

Our enemy is not other people. Our enemy is hatred, violence, discrimination, and fear.

Life is so much easier when God calls on me to do things I understand, like, and agree with. How will I respond to the things I don't understand, the things that make me uncomfortable, the things that others tell me are wrong? Will I be able to – like Hosea – say, “*I don't get it, but I am all in!*”?

May God give us the gift of discernment and the strength to do his Will, especially when we don't understand.

Amen.

Spirit in the Desert

Opening Song

Be Still

(London Fox Taize Choir)

Be Still, know that I am God.

Come, Drink of Living Water

(The London Fox Taize Choir)

Come drink of living water, never thirst again.

Bible Passage

(A passage takes us from one place to another)

Touchpoint

(Where God's story touches our life story)

Come, Bring Your Burdens to God (Woza Nomthwalo Wakho)

(John L. Bell, The Wild Goose Collection)

Swahili:

Woza nomthwalo wakho,

Woza nomthwalo wakho,

Woza nomthwalo wakho,

Uyes' akasozathi hayi.

Come, bring your burdens to God,
come, bring your burdens to God,
Come, bring your burdens to God
for Jesus will never say no.

The Meal

Our Father (The Lord's Prayer)

(The London Fox Taize Choir)

Benediction

The Lord Bless You and Keep You

(Peter Christian Lutkin, Messiah College Concert Choir, Linda L. Tedford)

The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord lift up his countenance upon you.

And give you peace (repeat)

The Lord makes his face to shine upon you and be gracious, and be gracious unto you. And be gracious. The Lord be gracious. Gracious unto you. Amen.