

“Called Home”

June 8, 2008

Scripture: Hosea 5:15-6:6; Matthew 9:9-13, 18-26

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Well, here we are. Here we are in a new home. Called to this new home and feeling a little tired and a little overwhelmed. We have uprooted ourselves, and it really sort of feels like that. It sort of feels like we've been torn; it's been a long, arduous tearing away from friends and familiarity. Don't get me wrong. I'm not pining for what we've left behind. But right now our family, I think, is feeling at loose ends, a bit frazzled and frayed, and very weary.

No transition is easy. There's always this period of uneasiness, uncertainty. Surrounded by boxes and discarded packing paper, you can start to feel a little lost. And you can start to think you may have lost some things irretrievably. We're still looking for Matthew's cell phone...and my Metamucil. So you can imagine that things aren't entirely comfortable just yet.

You might also imagine that I have not had a lot of time recently to think about these passages from Hosea and Matthew. I first looked at them, actually, a few weeks ago and had some initial impressions that led me to this sermon title. But I just didn't have a chance really to meditate on them. I'm struck, though, at how close I feel to the people Hosea is portraying in this exchange between God and Israel.

They are sort of lost. They haven't been uprooted from their homes, but they've lost their way nonetheless. There's no suggestion in Hosea that the people have failed in their religious duties. They're still attending worship and offering sacrifices. They're going through the motions. But they've lost a deeper understanding of what all of it means.

I find myself relating to that especially now when my life is in such disarray and upheaval. It is so easy to focus on those small inconveniences and minor annoyances that I can fail to recognize the deeper meaning of this move and this change in my life. And I suspect that many of us can relate to that. Sometimes our lives go on autopilot and we go through the motions of interacting with one another without realizing the deeper movements of God in our lives. We allow ourselves to become defined by our frenzy or our disarray or our uneasiness and we become too distracted to hear God calling us.

God called the people around Hosea away from their busyness with gestures of contrition to a closer, more intimate relationship: “For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.” God called them back, called them home.

It is the same call Jesus offers as he makes his way, just walking along as the gospel writer puts it. He calls folks home. And he calls to some rather unexpected people. Someone named Matthew, apparently a tax collector, a reject, a sinner. Jesus called him and Matthew followed, as well as many other rejects. What a disgrace! What a waste of talent. The guardians of propriety were stunned and offended. Wasn't it clear to Jesus that God had already decided the fate of such people? "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick." Jesus seems to know the difference those who are sick and those who are well...but the only prescription he offers is for the Pharisees. It seems the tax collectors and sinners aren't the only ones being called home.

We're called home to a place where compassion trumps religious practice. We're called home to a place where we're invited to stop and be still and listen for God's voice. We're called home to a place where God seeks us out and sits at our table to offer healing.

*Wandering and lost, Thou hast sought us and found us,
Stilled our rude hearts with Thy word of consoling;
Wrap now Thy peace like a mantle around us,
Guarding our thoughts and our passions controlling.*

We are called home. But responding means letting go of the fears that follow us and darken our lives. It means realizing that not even illness and death can define us anymore. In the presence of Christ they lose their power over us. If we can just make the barest connection, the fringe of a cloak or the touch of a hand, we could begin to make our way home.

It sounds easy enough. But there are times when anxiety over a misplaced or overpacked picture can send us careening away and cut us off from even the slightest connection to Christ. We lose our way at the merest bend in the road, and it takes time to find our way back again.

It takes time to make it home just as it will take time for this new place to become home for us; just as it will take time for you to feel at home with me. But we'll get there. We'll get there so long as we are committed to acts of compassion and not just empty gestures, so long as we're willing to discover together a deeper knowledge of God. That's a journey I am eager to begin with you, eager to call this place home.

Amen