

The Reverend Marjo Anderson

2-Narrative 10 – Hosea
Hosea 11:1-9 (Mark 10:13-14)

10 November 2019
Salem, Bridgeport

“Limitless Love”

Erik couldn't believe his eyes –

he couldn't be reading it right – she couldn't really have texted him such a message.

But no, there it was – the most hurtful text he had ever received.

He and Beth had loved each other.

He had reached out to her, had extended himself to her, had given her everything he had to give,

and she had responded in gratitude, helping him not only in some big ways but in a multitude of small ones.

Then last night he had sent her a text explaining that he had to cancel their date because of work

and she had gone ballistic.

First she had accused him of not caring. Not caring?! After everything he had ever done for her?!

And then, on top of that, she had accused him of cheating on her –

something that he had never done to anyone,

something he had never even considered doing,

something that was completely NOT in his nature.

The text so stunned him that he deleted it, trying to make as if it had never been, but it was seared into his mind.

She immediately tried to take it back,

but you can't unsay words, you can't rewind a relationship, you can't unstick the knife.

She begged and pleaded, cried and sobbed, but no matter what she said now,

he knew that all along she had mistrusted him.

And now he knew how hurtful she could be and he didn't think he could ever fully trust her again.

Love and joy had, in an instant, become grief and pain.

Max Jr. was there, wallpapering at the home of an old friend.

It had been 6 years since he had seen her and while he worked he was enjoying catching up with her.

They talked about her husband and kids; they talked about his wife and son;

they talked about his sister and her family; they talked about his other sister and his mom.

Then finally he got up the nerve to ask, “Do you see my dad much?”

She responded that she did see him occasionally, maybe a couple of times a year.

“We don't talk”, he told her. “It's been 6 years.

We had a falling out and that was it.

He said some things, did some things.

Maybe I deserved it, maybe he was just trying to help, but it hurt.

So I still respect him and I still love him and I think he knows that, but it's better if we don't talk.

It's better this way.”

Love and joy had, in an instant, become grief and pain.

Human relationships are so difficult.

And the relationships between lovers and between parent and child are the most difficult of all,

for it is in these most intimate relationships

that there is the greatest capacity for joy and the greatest capacity for pain.

Today's reading from Hosea, a poem of YHWH's anguished love for the beloved child Israel,

stands as one of the most poignant testimonies to divine love in the Old Testament, if not in the entire Bible.

Quite possibly the earliest expression of God's love in the Bible, it is also the most passionate,

as it portrays a God full of feelings.

Some might say that to ascribe such feelings to God is to anthropomorphize the divine,
but if you and I are created in God's image,

it only makes sense that who we are reflects to some degree who God is, right?

Some might say that God should be above such feelings of hurt and anger,

but if God is a god who desires our loyalty and love, it only makes sense that it matters to God if we give it.

Some might say that God is so self-sufficient that God does not need our love,

but if God is all about relationships, then our side of the relationship is as important as God's.

So how is your relationship to God? Both quantitatively and qualitatively?

Quantitatively, is it a close relationship or a distant one?

Max says he loves his dad but what kind of love is it if he hasn't spent any time with his dad in 6 years,

if he hasn't spoken to him,

if he hasn't allowed him to be a part of his life or the lives of his wife and their 12-year-old son in all that time?

How often do you talk with God? How often do you listen to what God has to say?

How much time do you spend cultivating your relationship to God?

Qualitatively, how would you describe your relationship with God?

Do you put your trust in God or in something or someone else?

Are you grateful for the innumerable blessings God provides or do you take them for granted?

Do you tell God of your love or just assume God knows?

Do you do things to bring God joy or are you more concerned with what God can do for you?

Our lesson today reminds us of how passionately God loves each of us.

Think back to the time that you were most overcome by love – maybe for a parent or a child, or a lover or a friend.

Remember how you felt?

Well multiply those feelings 10-fold, 100-fold, "infinity-fold" and you'll know how much God loves you.

But despite how much God loves us, we have not lived up to that love.

We have taken more than we have given. We have not fully trusted God.

We have not spent enough time with God. We have not expressed our love enough.

We have not invested enough of our time in making God happy.

Like Israel, we don't deserve God's love. But just as God continued to love Israel, so God continues to love us.

I have failed God. You have failed God. Together we have failed God.

And maybe God is tempted to abandon us to the consequences of our own misdeeds.

God is not like Max and his father who are content to allow the relationship to remain unredeemed.

God is not like Beth who let her own fears undermine her trust.

God is not like Erik whose hurt has caused him to retreat.

Our God is a god whose love, although tested, never fails.

Our God is a god whose power can heal any hurt, repair any relationship, fix any future.

No matter how many times we fail,

no matter how badly we mess things up,

no matter how what we do hurts and angers and disappoints God,

our faithlessness does not in the end change God's nature.

God loves you. And God is there for you.

And no matter what is going on in your life, God's love and God's power can make every part of your life better.

"For I know the plans I have for you", declares the Lord,

"plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.

Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you.

You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart." (Jeremiah 29:11-13)

We may disappoint God. We may hurt God. We may anger God.

But nothing we can do can ever, ever stop God from loving us.

Thanks be to God! **Amen**