

I'm Nobody! Who are you?

Vanessa Cardinale, July 25, 2010

Readings: Luke 11:1-13 and Hosea 1:2-10

So, I'll be honest, I chose to read the Hosea text second today because I felt badly asking someone else to read it - its sort of an intense text. That being said, I am going to begin by asking us to focus on the Luke Text.

Luke 11:1-13 has a clear subject matter, that of prayer.

To begin, I have to be honest with you and in a sense come clean before I speak with you about prayer. It is one of the elements of faith life that I am most uncomfortable with, It is very much a "growing edge" for me. I very humbly offer this sermon to you as someone who is very much still a student of prayer. I might as well be that disciple who opens up the Luke passage today, and asks "Lord, teach me to pray...."

But in my learning, I do know enough about prayer to know that it is near impossible to box it up or give a simple explanation of how to do it. It seems that there are countless ways to pray, as shown in the myriad of ways different faith traditions and individuals pray. The common denominator seems to be that at the heart of it prayer is the act of seeking relationship with God. We might use words, or sit in an attempt to empty ourselves. Prayer takes the form of song, as it often does here in worship, or dance. For me, poetry is a powerful form of prayer. I have been instructed in walking prayer, and I would even say that some of the most prayerful moments I have experienced have been in conversation with others.

I would like to share a poem by Joy Harjo, a native american poet, that I think speaks to prayer and the connection that we seek: It is called Eagle Poem

To pray you open your whole self
To sky, to earth, to sun, to moon
To one whole voice that is you.
And know there is more
That you can't see, can't hear,
Can't know except in moments
Steadily growing, and in languages
That aren't always sound but other circles of motion.
Like eagle that Sunday morning
Over Salt River.
Circled in blue sky
In wind, swept our hearts clean
With sacred wings.
We see you, see ourselves and know
That we must take the utmost care

And kindness in all things.
Breathe in, knowing that we are made of
All this, and breathe, knowing
We are truly blessed because we
Were born, and die soon within a
True circle of motion,
Like eagle rounding out the morning Inside us.
We pray that it will be done
In beauty.
In beauty.

That beauty that Jesus shares with his disciples are the words that we know so well, as we repeat them every Sunday in prayer - the prayer we know as the Lords' Prayer - this prayer we pray for the coming of a kingdom where all have enough food and debts are forgiven - the creation of a world in which, as Joy Harjo so beautifully wrote, "we take the utmost care and kindness in all things."

So why does prayer feel so difficult sometimes? Why can prayer feel like a burden? I have been sitting with this quite a bit, and the answer that I was able to find presented itself in, of all places, the Hosea text today. After taking the time to get through all the really difficult and harsh language (and believe me, it did take some time) what I found at the root of this passage is that of relationship with God. The people of Israel have abandoned God - made war, defiled the temple, and forgotten about "the one light that is you."

It is to those actions that God instructs Hosea to create such a dysfunctional family - marry a whore, and have children whose names mean "No-Mercy" and "Nobody". For, in a tit for tat way, God is telling the people of Israel, **if I am nobody to you, than you are nobody to me.**

And sometimes its seems easier to be nobody - if you are nobody than who are you accountable to? There seems sometimes to be safety in anonymity. To render others as "nobodies" also seems to make things easier as well. How can you care about a person if they aren't actually a person, but a nobody? It would be easy enough to simplify your life by making a few more nobodies out there - immigrants, the poor, my neighbor, anyone I don't agree with, I am sure all of us can fill in the blank - this list goes on and on.

And, luckily, so does the Hosea passage. It does not end with God rendering God's people as nobodies, but rather the hope that as somebodies, as **"people of the living God" and they will live in a way that bears witness to that relationship.** And, although the lectionary ends somewhat abruptly and leaves out the best part - God goes on to rename his children from Lo-Ruhamah "No Mercy", and Lo-Ammi - "Nobody" to Ruhamah, "Mercy", and Ammi "My People," or "My Beloved."

There is both a gift and a responsibility that comes with God calling us her people. We don't get to call anyone nobodies. Which in my opinion, can really complicate things, especially if you are having a bad day. There is not "other." We are all Gods people. To live out God's call to us we must be diligent in prayer - the prayer of words, the prayer of deed.

The prayer that Jesus teaches us, The Lord's prayer, is for everyone, and of everyone. When we speak it becomes a part of each of us, and as a community it reminds us of our unbreakable relationship with God in the face of debt, isolation, and hunger. It is a prayer prayed in community - using the language of we, and us.

Seeing poetry as prayer, and prayer as poetry, and as both being part of our stories and struggles, I close with what I have come to see as a type of Lord's prayer. They are the words of Salvadoran Roque Dalton from his poem "Like You."

Like You - Roque Dalton

Like you I
love love, life, the sweet smell
of things, the sky-
blue landscape of January days.

And my blood boils up
and I laugh through eyes
that have known the buds of tears.
I believe the world is beautiful
and that poetry, like bread, is for everyone.

And that my veins don't end in me
but in the unanimous blood
of those who struggle for life,
love,
little things,
landscape and bread,
the poetry of everyone.

Amen