

Text: Hosea 11 & Luke 12:13-31

At first glance our lesson from Hosea and our lesson from Luke seem to have absolutely nothing in common. But the more I pondered these stories this week, the more I saw a common theme coming to the fore- the theme of God's call to spiritual maturity, because spiritual immaturity runs rampant in these readings and its main signal is the reliance on one's own self-centered interests and knowledge rather than seeking God and God's will for all God's people. In other words, the lessons today show us what it looks like when we believe that we alone know how and when and what to do.

I know something about this – because I was once a teenager. Now I realize some teenagers are more mature than others – but I certainly went through a very immature phase when I thought I knew better than pretty much everyone, certainly better than my parents and even God. I counted myself an agnostic for a while and wondered why I would ever need to consult my parents, God, the Church or anyone else about my choices. I have had many opportunities recently to remember what I was like as a teenager because I'm a mother of a teenager now. I know I was a real challenge for my parents at times and being a parent of a teenager can be challenging, but I take heart when I talk to other parents because we seem to have similar experiences.

Let me share a few actual tweets by parents of teenagers. Parents write:

- Babies & small children need attention 24/7. Then they become teens & hide in their rooms, avoiding you as much as possible, to make up for it.
- The thing I like about having teens is how they make a bunch of plans because they're "independent" & then ask to borrow money.
- If you doubt my dedication to a higher power, you should see how many prayers I can recite while riding passenger to my teen driver.

- Nothing makes me more nervous than a text from my teenage son that says, "How soon will you be home?"

In the lesson from Hosea, God speaks and sounds so much like the parent of wayward teenager in dealing with the people of Israel. God says essentially, "Look, I have loved you as a child, but the more I called you, the more you went away from me." And, "I taught you to walk, I took you up in my arms, but you don't even realize all I've done for you now. I used to lift you to my cheek and stoop down to feed you...but these days you have been bent on turning away from me." This image of God as a loving parent is a beautiful one, and a far cry from the wrathful, vengeful deity God is sometimes viewed as. We know at the time of Hosea's writing that Israel had rejected God's covenant with them by seeking military alliances with the Assyrians and then the Egyptians- the very source of their slavery. These kinds of actions had previously caused the Israelites to be devoured by militarism. And God now speaks to them like a parent to immature and rebellious teenagers- exhaustedly urging them to stop rejecting God and God's ways...and yet they continue down their independent and foolish path.

We see something similar in our lesson from Luke's Gospel when we read of someone else who seems to be lost in their self-centered, immature perspective. The rich fool believes he has all the answers – he doesn't need God or God's counsel, or anyone else's for that matter. Listen to the way the rich fool talks to himself while making important decisions about his abundance and wealth: "What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops? `I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods." As Dr. Barbara Lundblad puts it, the rich fool has an "I problem." (A me and mine alone problem.) Instead of even beginning to look to the wisdom and call of God through prayer or Scripture or anywhere else, he sees all that he has been given as his own, and he seems to pray to himself, "I will say to my soul, `Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many

years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.” What the fool misses is that this approach will be a complete waste – and no one will ever benefit – not even him – from his abundant wealth, because his life is about to end. Just think what amazing things could have been done with his abundance to benefit others had he sought God in a mature dialogue of faith.

What would this man’s dialogue sound like if he had taken the spiritually mature approach, and sought the wisdom of God, and not his alone? Instead of asking, “What should I do” it may have sounded like, “What would you have me do God?” And this is the starting place for any and all of us who seek a mature faith and claim to follow the way of Jesus, who said, “Not my will be done, but Thy will.” And taught us to pray, “Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done.”

I remember, after my teenage years as I became a young adult – I returned to the Church because I began to realize that my parents, God and the Church might have something to teach me. That there was wisdom here far beyond my own. The first step for me too was the question, “What would you have me do God?” and not simply, “What do I want?” “What serves me?” And this isn’t a problem only for teenagers- we can struggle with this at any age, and we do. The rich fool was presumably an old man.

This month -- August 2019 marks the anniversary of the start of slavery in America exactly 400 years ago. It was in August of 1619 that the first group of slaves arrived in Jamestown on the ship called “The White Lion” from Africa to serve as slaves for American merchants. This Sunday, the Union of Black Episcopalians has invited all of us in the Episcopal Church to remember this event and to pray that we will never make peace with oppression. We are called out of the immature and selfish mindsets described in Hosea and Luke and instead, to emulate the compassion of God – the tender-hearted love of God – who will stand up for us in love no matter what. And as we remember our racist history, we can’t help but notice today

the troubles of our present moment – and confess that we still struggle as a people, to free ourselves from the shackles of hatred and bigotry towards those who differ from us. We continue to witness racially based killings. The shooter in El Paso that killed 20 this weekend was motivated by racial hatred -his manifesto described the “invasion” of Latino immigrants. We continue to see attacks on places of worship and dehumanizing rhetoric against our fellow human brothers and sisters- what St. Paul describes in our Colossians reading today as “abusive language.” We should also note that human trafficking still goes on all around us, though more hidden than the slavery of the past- slavery continues today in America. And then we are forced to reckon with the fact that we have a calling and even an uncomfortable responsibility as people of God to respond- in word or deed. And we start by asking the question of a mature faith: “What then, would you have me do God?” We can’t do everything, but we can do something, wherever and whoever we are.

Because we always have a choice – a choice to rely on the God who made us – a God who loves us like a parent, that Hosea describes as having a heart “warm with compassion.” How can we today rely on God and imitate God with this kind of fierce love for all people? The choices we make have consequences, certainly for ourselves, but for everyone. And, as the Church and as individuals, Scripture invites us to ask today: “What would you have us do God?” And then be ready to do it. I don’t have all the answers, none of us do- but God does.

What would God have us do?