

“Rooted in Prayer”
Hosea 1:20-21; Colossians 2:6-19;
Luke 11:1-13

July 24, 2016
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As I hear the news or watch TV, I often come up with one word: “Really?” That really happened? Is that really going on? These days it’s very hard for me to acknowledge the reality of some of the things that I’m hearing: the violence that’s going on around the world, the loss of life in our own country, the divisiveness that I hear, the disunity that’s happening, the setting up of one group against another. It wasn’t what I thought we were headed towards or wanted, and so I keep saying, “Really?” with a sense of disbelief.

I guess it’s partly my expectation that we wanted something different in this world. It is perhaps our expectations that often get us in trouble, our expectations about how things should be. I keep hearing there’s a lot of anger in the United States, and it has to do somehow with our expectations. What do we expect?

I know that oftentimes it’s my expectations that get me in trouble, because they are unrealistic, and I expect something that is not going to happen. And sometimes, I’m so busy expecting one thing that I can’t enjoy the very thing that does happen. And sometimes I miss a good thing. There are a lot of different kinds of expectations, and I acknowledge that mine are often partial, not knowing fully, sometimes built on misconceptions.

There is One who probably does have a sense of expectation that really understands what can be expected. I would expect that’s God. After all, if we think of God as creator, there is a certain One who knows how things might work and can work. Although sometimes after reading something like the Old Testament lesson today, I want to come back again and say “Really?” It’s an unexpected text, in a way; an unexpected way for God to express God’s own expectations, by asking God’s people to stay in relationship and not go off in another way. Maybe it helps get our attention a little bit. It feels like that’s what Hosea was about.

So as we think about those sets of expectations and how they are built, I wonder how many of you actually read the Sermon on the Mount or the Sermon on the Plain this week, and read about the different things that Jesus taught in each of those. If we just look at the shorter passage in Luke, we see there are about four main topics:

1. Loving your enemy;
2. Not condemning others;
3. When trying to understand whether something is good, to look at its fruits;
4. What kind of foundation we build on.

And that’s the short version. If you go to Matthew the list of topics is a lot longer. But just looking at the short list—loving your enemies, not condemning others, and looking at the fruits to see whether they’re good—in some ways feels like an immediate

contrast with what society tells me about what I should know and do. Judging and condemning one another seems to be rampant these days. I'm having a hard time seeing how we're loving our enemies. Jesus' teaching feels a little contrary to the world around us, what society seems to teach us, what the trajectory of the world seems to be. We seem to deal with our problems with violence somehow. I mean, loving your enemies and being told to go kill somebody is a very different thing. There seems to be some kind of contradiction there. And so we might again say something like, "Really?"

In some ways I think that is the question. What's real? Because it feels to me like in our society today we don't take God seriously. Is God real? Did God create everything that is? Is God really present? If you answer that in the affirmative as I would tend to do, God is real. God is present. God cares about God's people, God cares about God's creation. What does that really mean?

When I accept that God is real, it feels to me like I am accepting that something is more real than anything that human thought can come up with—more real than, as Paul puts it, "The philosophies and human ways of thinking." And yet, I think it is very hard to live today as if God is real, because we live in a society that doesn't pay attention to God, or that thinks God is the problem—or at least religion is the problem. But if God is real, what do we do? How do we listen? Do we notice the difference that God brings to us, like in these two sermons of Jesus?

Now, I often feel like it's easy to go on and say, "These are the things we supposed to do..." And I'm not sure it's that simple. Because it feels to me like as we confront the struggle with allowing God to be real, there has to be a way to enter into the realness of God, a relationship with God. And I think that's why Jesus, in the middle of the Sermon on the Mount, talks about the Lord's Prayer. I think that's why, as we go on in Luke, the disciples see Jesus praying and they recognize there's something there that's important, and again he teaches them the Lord's Prayer.

When Paul is talking about being rooted and built in faith in Jesus, in Christ, there has to be a way for that to happen. I think I mentioned one way last week: we read, we listen to the word of Jesus, we listen to scripture. The second of those is prayer, the opportunity to pray. The word prayer means "coming and speaking with", "asking", "opening ourselves." There's one root in the Old Testament that means simply "coming and being in the presence of." As I look at the words of Jesus and I think about the challenging way it strikes me and how it's so different from what it feels like our society is telling us today, to do that seems almost impossible. That's why I think we're directed again to prayer. And as Jesus teaches his disciples to pray, I think he gives us some building blocks to faith that will allow us to deal with the world.

We can briefly look at the building blocks that are in the Lord's Prayer. Hallowed be thy name, honor God. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. So, honor God, care about God's will, and then we can acknowledge our need for sustenance, and then our even a deeper need for forgiveness.

Again, it's one of those real contrasts with today's society, because society says everything you need is in yourself, it's all about me, what I want, my pleasure, my needs, my thoughts. There's no need for forgiveness in that. But as I recognize that I'm limited, I make bad decisions, I hurt people, I struggle with things that have developed in my life that I know I need to change, forgiveness is important. It's a moment of humility, a moment of coming and recognizing that I'm not perfect, that I haven't had it all figured out, and nobody else does either.

And so we can forgive one another, and then we can ask God to lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. It's so easy to want to jump into simply thinking, "Well, I'll just love my enemy." But I don't think I can do that without first recognizing who God is, knowing I need to think about God's will and make it central in my life, knowing the forgiveness I need, and the leading I need from God, not into temptation but away from evil. Praying, coming into God's presence, allows those kinds of things to be what I bring to God.

Both of the two sermons end with the story about the guy building on sand or building on rock. It feels to me that to go into the world and deal with the world we live in, we have to have a solid foundation, and that foundation, as I understand it, is built through our faith, which is developed by listening to Jesus, to scripture, and praying to God. And what's the promise at the very end of the passage in Luke? That when we do that, when we persevere in prayer, when we come believing God is good and will lead us in good ways and will lead us in good things, God will give us the Holy Spirit. God will be present with us. It's the foundational nature of faith and our relationship with God. And I don't know how we're going to deal with this world we live in if we can't develop that foundation together. It's an ongoing growing that we can do. The way Paul puts it is being "rooted and built" In prayer, through prayer.

I invite you this week to use the Lord's Prayer, to pray it each day and maybe each day take a phrase and focus on that particular phrase. So the first day would be Honor God, hallowed be thy name. The next day think about God's will being done on earth. The next day think about needing our daily bread. The next day forgiveness, what it means to me, and what it means to extend it to others. Finally, ask God not to lead us into temptation but to deliver us from evil. God knows, we need to be delivered from evil today.

So I invite you to pray this week and to use the Lord's Prayer to walk through the week, as we build that foundation for dealing with the world we live in. Amen.