

“Beloved”
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Hosea 11:1-4; 1 Corinthians 13:8-13;
Matthew 3:13-17

In Hosea, we hear God talking about how he was inviting his people, treating them as infants with cords of human kindness and bands of love. I was thinking about that and how as children, as a baby, we vary so differently from other animals. A baby horse is born, and it's up in a few minutes walking around. How long does it take a human child to start walking? Eight months to two years or something in that range? What a difference! The human child seems to need to learn a lot of things. All through childhood we are learning.

Jesus did the same. He was learning all through his childhood. We saw last week he was still learning as he went to the Temple. He was soaking it in, asking great questions. Some people say, at least Robert Fulghum said, that we learned everything we need to know in Kindergarten. I think there's some truth to that, some idea that in our youth we learn some really important things. In fact, it feels to me like with our youngest people, we teach them the things we think are most important. Values like share everything and play fair. I would add to his list “be honest.” That's not his full list, but the idea that we teach the very best of who we are to our children tends to be true.

And then we come to this time of transition. Now in First Corinthians, just before we get to this transition, one of the things that Paul has said is that love never ends. But then he goes on to talk about this passage. I remember when I was in Junior High, the minister came to our Sunday School class and asked, “What's your favorite passage in the Bible?” I think at 12 or 13 I was too shy to say First Corinthians 13 because it was all about love. So I said instead, “When I was a child I thought like a child. When I became an adult I put away childish things.” There's this moment of transition. What does it mean to put away childish things?

We struggle with that idea of putting away childish things. One thing I think Paul suggests is that it's not putting away love. Love never ends. But what does it mean? There's another way of saying that today. Some people might say it's called adulting. We have this penchant, I think, for making nouns into verbs. But there's this sense that the idea of adulting is “I don't know quite how to do this, but I've got to become that way. You know—an adult.” Sometimes it feels like if I just do what other people do when they are adults, then maybe people will think I'm an adult too. I think sometimes young people think that it's only young people that have that feeling. I think some of us go through life wondering if we're ever going to become an adult.

What does it mean to make these transitions? Sometimes when I hear the phrase “grow up,” it feels to me like I'm supposed to put away those childish things. What are those childish things? Are those the values I learned as a child? Sometimes it feels a little bit that way. I'm now supposed to be in this world that is combative. I'm supposed to be in this world where it's about success and power and control and conflict. I'm

supposed to use aggression and violence to get my way. It almost feels like sometimes you're supposed to be good as a child and bad as an adult. I feel like that's a little bit ridiculous.

I would suggest instead that as adults we have to begin to weigh the good and the bad much more carefully. Perhaps we're no longer in that mode where we're always learning, but now sometimes we have to apply it. It's not that the values go away or that the values change, but we have to figure out how to live them in a world that doesn't always share these values. I wish I knew why the world doesn't value them more. So there's this weighing that has to go on. Yet, so often we can feel like a child at a crossroads wondering what to do and how to do it.

It is as I see Jesus coming to this transition in his life that I think about what he does. He was coming to a baptism that was generally thought about as repentance. But we generally think about Jesus as not needing to repent, at least not of sin. What does repentance mean? It means turning to God. What was he doing when he was coming to his baptism? It was a milestone in his life. He was making a turn. I'm not sure exactly what he had been doing. Maybe he had been in carpentry for a while, maybe he had finally grown up, but now he was making a turn. He said to John as he came, "I want to be baptized by you." John said, "No way. I need to be baptized by *you*." What was Jesus' response? "I want to fulfill all righteousness."

I think sometimes you might get tired of me talking about righteousness, wondering why I keep bringing up that word. Well, it keeps coming up. There's something there, something important. Jesus wanted to fulfill all righteousness. He wanted his relationship with John to be one that was good and healthy and right. Helpful. He wanted a relationship with the people of his time. He wanted his relationship with God to be a good one, a healthy one. He wanted to turn now to what God had called him to do and begin to do it. It was his transitional moment. It was like a graduation. In fact, we get God coming to his graduation and saying, "Look! This is my beloved, and I am well-pleased with him." It speaks to us of what it means to think about our own transitional moments.

As Jesus is baptized, he is turning to God. I think sometimes when we begin to think about the idea that we make Jesus our model, and he's coming to God and saying, "I want to fulfill all righteousness," how do our lives fulfill all righteousness? That turning to God is part of that transitional moment. Can we think of those transitional moments in our own lives where we have turned to God? This is a special moment in Jesus' life. Can we think of our own special moments of transition? It's a transition, then, that invites us to continue that process, to follow Him.

Sometimes I think about the idea of having goals or direction, changing our way, confronting a world that is full of struggle and strife, and wondering about why and beginning to wonder if there's anything I can really do, wondering if I can be part of the solution rather than the problem. It's easy to begin to think I can't; there's nothing I can do. I think this is an invitation again to hear and to see Jesus making a transition and

inviting us to follow him. He doesn't become a combatant in a world where he's just trying to be successful, where he's just trying to be famous, he's just trying to be rich, he's just trying to be all those things. Instead, he's turning to God because he knows that's where his soul needs to be. What feeds our souls is turning to God.

This transition in his life invites me to think about our own transitions, to think about the times in life when we've had them and to think about the challenge of them in our own lives and how often it seems to be such a struggle. It feels to me that there's a lot going on in the world today that is hard, and it sometimes can be overwhelming. I begin to say I can't. I can't address racism. I can't address the problems of the government. I can't address the problems of division between people. I can't do all that on my own.

I don't think we can. But we have Jesus to show us the way. He helps us, heals us, and teaches us. He guides us and invites us into a new way. It's not into a new way that's simply black or white. He doesn't say you go from can't to can overnight. In fact, I don't know that he says you can go from can't to can at all. You go from can't to try. I think it's that transition for us that we are invited to continue to do. That transition to try. To move again to do what Jesus calls us to do. To recognize that Jesus enables us to be God's children. When we recognize we struggle and even when we fail, we can turn again and be forgiven and try again. It's always hard because there's this sense today that we have to be perfect. I don't think that's what it's about. It's about turning and moving toward. It's about making these transitions, like Jesus made the transition, turning to do what God calls him to do and living into the life God invites him to, to his own ministry.

It's an invitation for us as well to live into the life that God would have us live. And then there's the question that comes in the contrast between Hosea and the baptism. You see, in Hosea, God is lamenting. He's shown these cords of kindness and bands of love to his people and what have they done? They haven't responded, and so he laments over their turn away. Whereas in Jesus he is celebrating as Jesus turns toward him. That's our invitation. It's our choice as well as we become adults, as we transition into the people of God to continue to make that turn toward God and not away. Not because of fear or because somebody tells us we have to, but because we have a God who loves us and will lament over us as we turn away, or will celebrate with us when we turn toward.

It's a hope, it's a realization that Jesus invites us not into a life where it's all combat over who is best or who gets what. He invites us into something very different. He invites us into a life of faith, of hope, and of love. A life where we trust in God enough that we can see the hope, the possibility before us, that we can live into it by caring for one another and showing the grace of God to each other. And that can change the world. It's not by changing the world for us; it's by changing the way we engage with the world. It's simply following Jesus, turning to God, allowing it to be our transition again and again. Amen.