

This Little Light of Mine
Hosea 5:15-6:6
06-11-2023

“I will return again to my place.”

That’s probably not the way we would say it today. We would more likely say something like,
“Yah I’m going away for a while, but I am definitely coming back.”

A child might have heard their father say this before they left to go to prison. A sailor or a soldier may have said this, as well, before being underway or on deployment.

When I was in third grade, I told all my friends in Minnesota these exact words, “I have to go to Boston MA, for a year, *but I am coming back.*”

My Dad had an opportunity to do a yearlong master’s program at M.I.T. and that meant we were all going. It was a whole thing that turned out to be one of the greatest years of my life, but, you couldn’t tell me that at the time...such is life.

But I did learn that you can do anything for a year, after all, you know you are coming back!

It’s hard to say what the people of God knew, because the prophecy is about their return from *exile before they went into exile* for their sins against God.

So, it likely became clear to them in their despair when in captivity, that they could look at this prophecy again and gain hope they never knew that they had.

Imagine if you will, going somewhere against your will and not knowing when you will come back, or even if you will come back.

Bruce Bryan, wrongfully accused of murder in Queens NY, spent 30 years having little or no hope of getting out of prison. *He did not know if he was ever coming back!*

Now free, because the corruption of the District Attorney which landed him in jail was discovered, Bruce was exonerated from his false imprisonment.

Of that experience Bruce said, “Prison is a cold environment and it’s up to you to create your own heat. It’s a dark environment and somehow you gotta find that light, you know that light within yourself in order to travel, in order to do something with your life more meaningful.”

He continues, “...you can become *bitter*, or you can become *better*; I chose the latter because one of the things I did earlier in my incarceration was make a conscious decision to not *serve time* but to have time *serve me.*”

He went on to detail how he used his cell as an office, he read things he would never have read as a free man, he learned from the experiences of other people through autobiographies and philosophy, to possibly be able to go home, and never find himself in a place where this could ever happen to him again.

For 30 years, Bruce lived not knowing if his innocence would be proven and whether he would be set free.

Well, today he is free and a part of a bigger movement to help all those similarly vexed find the path to freedom for themselves as well.

That's the best example I can find today to relate to the pain the people of God were feeling in their captivity, the only difference being, God's people, unlike Bruce...were totally guilty.

But they knew from Hosea that even though God wounded them grievously for their insolence and rejection of the one true God, this same God would heal them, restore them, and give them freedom from their all deserved incarceration.

When I worked in the prisons in Memphis TN as a lowly Vicar, there was virtually no innocence lost. These were hardened repeat criminals in the late 90's. I would pray with prisoners that they would find real freedom in Christ even though they would most likely never see earthly freedom again.

They knew the consequences of their sins because they were too grievous for society to tolerate, and their freedom was no longer a right they would enjoy.

The violence, drugs, and willful stealing or destruction of property was all the evidence the police needed to use the full force of the authority of the government to wield the sword of justice upon the wrong doer.

The consequence was swift, just, and absolute. There was no denying what sin could do to destroy their lives. But there was also no denying the path to restoration in eternity.

Like Bruce, they just had to find their light in that cold dark world.

But, the juvenile detention had restoration of the youth offender in mind. So, pastors, businessmen, social workers, and educators had full access to give them a new chance at life, not if, but when they would be free, and help them be virtuous rather than return to the vice that landed them there in the first place.

For the people of God in captivity their teachers, their social workers, their pastors, were the prophets like Hosea, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel; giving them the counsel from the Word of God to prepare them for the day when they would be free indeed!

All they had to do was find *their light!*

Hosea told them clearly what to look for saying, “After two days he will revive us; and on that 3rd day He will raise us up!”

I don't think anyone sitting here today listening to these very words can possibly miss the magnitude of what God is revealing, through His prophet Hosea.

For on the 3rd day our Savior Jesus, rose from the dead after being crucified for our sins, so we could be free from our dark prison of Sheol, that Jesus descended into to tell the Devil his chains could no longer bind us, because He paid the debt our sins caused us, and now we are free!

This may not have meant much to the people of Hosea's day but...

...to their ancestors, generations later, it would be read again in the retelling of their victorious return to Jerusalem, showing they were freed from the shackles of Assyria and later Babylon, and so *they would be freed* not only from the Greeks and Roman overlords, but more importantly *from the Devil*, by the King who died and revived on the 3rd day.

The light that shined in the darkness was revealed and gave more than they ever dreamed of, not freedom from the Romans but true freedom from sin, death, and even the Devil himself.

But, as I said before, they still needed to find their light, in a cruel dark world. For the apostles were immediately set up by enemies to the Gospel of our Risen Lord Jesus.

They were hunted, persecuted, and martyred because they would not recant what they saw, touched, and that they even ate with the Risen Light of the World.

The Words of Hosea would encourage them yet again in their difficult times recognizing that though the night be dark “press on to know the LORD; His going out is as sure as the dawn.”

And press on they did, knowing everything they are and everything they should be, was driven by God's Word alone.

And we should never forget the power of God's Word, as Hosea says in verse 5, “Therefore I have hewn them by the prophets; I have slain them by the words of my mouth,”

This powerful prophecy from God echoed by Isaiah 55:11 which says, “...so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I

sent it.

Hosea closes the circle of the powerful purpose of the Word,
“...and judgement goes forth as the light!”

This is the Word God; Jesus in the flesh in person and the work of His Crucifixion. This Word does not reveal the light, this Word is the light. And this Word judges in a way that no one ever saw coming.

“Don’t judge me you Judgy Judy!”

I can’t remember who said it or where I was when I first heard it, but it was obviously gleaned from the enormously entertaining Judge Judy television show.

But many of you may not know, she is not the original Judge TV show. That honor belongs to The Honorable Judge Wapner of “The People’s Court.”

Judge Jerry Scheindlin, who was the Husband of Judy Scheindlin, came after and his wife is who we get that catchy phrase from to this day.

These were and still are very popular shows that give a lot of attention to the personalities of the judges. Until this point, most media and entertainment simply had the judge as the stoic figure in the background while the charismatic attorneys had all the dramatic lines and speeches that we hung on the edge of our seat to hear how they presented the evidence to convict or exonerate the defendant.

I don’t know this for sure, but the snappy control of the Judge in the newer tv shows may have given rise to this negative notion of judgment. Instead of simply discerning what was right and what was wrong, it became more a show of how the Judge showed their power, controlled the courtroom, and maybe even on occasion, jumped to conclusions in the interest of the time limits of the television program.

And I wonder if that contributed to a more negative view of judging and was somehow aligned with judgmental Christians as well.

Do we over do it? Do we use the purity of God’s Word to show power over others? Do we think, deep down in our souls we are somehow worthy of the forgiveness won on the cross? If we do, we are most to be pitied, because we misunderstood Grace and turn it into yet another Law, *we think we fulfilled*.

The only judging we do, is the judgement that comes from God, and this is when God declares us judged, because in us He found light, not because we had the light, but because Christ is the light, having come to us, and making His eternal dwelling with us.

That is what Hosea means when He speaks God's word saying, "My judgement goes forth as the light."

Tertullian, the ancient church father says it best, "Justice is the very fulness of the Deity Himself, manifesting God as both a perfect father and a perfect master: a father in His mercy, a master in discipline" (ANF 3:308)

You know where that light shines? It shines where God makes His dwelling. And You know where He makes His dwelling? With everyone who believes He died and rose for them!

This week in VBS the kids sang one of my favorite Christian Songs "This Light of Mine!" While there is nothing little about this light in our lives, I still think this song says it better than any other hymn ever could. Michael, will you please kick us off as we all sing it together to close.

Rev. Marc A. Kappel, M.Div.
Faith Lutheran Church & School
Eustis, FL