

**Opening Prayer**

**Lord, open our hearts and minds by the power of your Holy Spirit that, as the Scriptures are read and discussed, we may hear with joy what you say to us today. Amen.**

**Hosea 11:1-11**

<sup>11:1</sup> When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. <sup>2</sup> The more I called them, the more they went from me; they kept sacrificing to the Baals, and offering incense to idols. <sup>3</sup> Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk, I took them up in my arms; but they did not know that I healed them. <sup>4</sup> I led them with cords of human kindness, with bands of love. I was to them like those who lift infants to their cheeks. I bent down to them and fed them. <sup>5</sup> They shall return to the land of Egypt, and Assyria shall be their king, because they have refused to return to me. <sup>6</sup> The sword rages in their cities, it consumes their oracle-priests, and devours because of their schemes. <sup>7</sup> My people are bent on turning away from me. To the Most High they call, but he does not raise them up at all. <sup>8</sup> How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, O Israel? How can I make you like Admah? How can I treat you like Zeboiim? My heart recoils within me; my compassion grows warm and tender. <sup>9</sup> I will not execute my fierce anger; I will not again destroy Ephraim; for I am God and no mortal, the Holy One in your midst, and I will not come in wrath. <sup>10</sup> They shall go after the LORD, who roars like a lion; when he roars, his children shall come trembling from the west. <sup>11</sup> They shall come trembling like birds from Egypt, and like doves from the land of Assyria; and I will return them to their homes, says the LORD.

**Commentary**

The prophet paints a picture of a heartbroken God. The “child” God protected and tended so carefully failed to acknowledge that loving care, rejected its true parent, God, and instead adopted the polytheistic ways of worship and sacrifice of their Canaanite neighbors. God laments this painful rejection like a mother who grieves as her child neither returns her affections nor allows her care to awaken loyalty and love, but instead adopts a lifestyle that can only bring the child harm. Rather than punish in anger and retribution (as some parents in this world do), God decides to act with compassion and forbearance. Though Assyria will swallow up Israel for a time, the place carved out in God’s heart for Israel would in the end ensure restoration and redemption.

## Reflection

Why might you think God is so compassionate to these people? What does this say about the character of God? How does history compare with the prophet's reading of God's heart?

### Colossians 3:1-11

<sup>3:1</sup> So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. <sup>2</sup> Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, <sup>3</sup> for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. <sup>4</sup> When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory. <sup>5</sup> Put to death, therefore, whatever in you is earthly: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed (which is idolatry). <sup>6</sup> On account of these the wrath of God is coming on those who are disobedient. <sup>7</sup> These are the ways you also once followed, when you were living that life. <sup>8</sup> But now you must get rid of all such things--anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive language from your mouth. <sup>9</sup> Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have stripped off the old self with its practices <sup>10</sup> and have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator. <sup>11</sup> In that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all!

## Commentary

This reading begins an artfully structured instruction in the kind of behavior that reflects the new life into which Jesus calls us. A person is characterized by many traits that neither reflect God's character nor embody God's desires for human beings in their relationships with one another. Verses 5 and 8 list some of these attitudes and behaviors. Few of us can hear the list without feeling some pang of guilt. Whether we put money ahead of people, give vent to road rage, bear ill will against one another, or seek personal pleasure or gratification at the expense of the well-being of our partner, we have failed to embody God's vision for human community. This contest does not instantly disappear when we are initiated into the body of Christ. Nevertheless, having entered into God's new creation in Christ, it becomes our proper response to purge ourselves of all that stands in the way of that vision, in which "Christ is all in all." (v. 11)

## Reflection

How is this struggle between the old and the new manifested in your own life?

### Luke 12:13-21

<sup>12:13</sup> Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me." <sup>14</sup> But he said to him, "Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?" <sup>15</sup> And he said to them, "Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for

one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions." <sup>16</sup> Then he told them a parable: "The land of a rich man produced abundantly. <sup>17</sup> And he thought to himself, 'What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?' <sup>18</sup> Then he said, '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. <sup>19</sup> And I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.' <sup>20</sup> But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' <sup>21</sup> So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God."

## Commentary

The parable shows Jesus' connection with the wisdom tradition of Israel. The author of Ecclesiastes, for example, comments on those who gain wealth, but who, at death, are prevented by God from enjoying it (6:2). The earlier wisdom authors wrote of the futility of laying up riches rather than enjoying them as one goes along and the folly of postponing pleasure for the sake of amassing wealth. Jesus, however, pointed to a greater danger, namely standing before God at the end of life with nothing of lasting value to show for one's existence. Having played the world's game and come out, in the bank accounts, a "winner," the person finds out at the end that he or she has nothing but empty hands, an empty heart, and an empty life.

## Reflection

Consider the quality of your life and the nature of your relationship with God. How can you invest more fully in that relationship and the things of eternal value? What assets will you have to reallocate to do so?

## Responsive Psalter

From Psalm 107:1-9, 43

- <sup>107:1</sup> O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;  
for his steadfast love endures forever.
- <sup>2</sup> **Let the redeemed of the LORD say so,  
those he redeemed from trouble**
- <sup>3</sup> **and gathered in from the lands,  
from the east and from the west,  
from the north and from the south.**
- <sup>4</sup> Some wandered in desert wastes,  
finding no way to an inhabited town;
- <sup>5</sup> **hungry and thirsty,  
their soul fainted within them.**
- <sup>6</sup> Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble,  
and he delivered them from their distress;
- <sup>7</sup> **he led them by a straight way,**

**until they reached an inhabited town.**

**<sup>8</sup> Let them thank the LORD for his steadfast love,  
for his wonderful works to humankind.**

**<sup>9</sup> For he satisfies the thirsty,  
and the hungry he fills with good things.**

**<sup>107:43</sup> Let those who are wise give heed to these things,  
and consider the steadfast love of the LORD.**

### **Closing Prayer**

**Grant, O Lord, that what we have said with our lips we may believe in our hearts, and that what we believe in our hearts we may practice in our lives, through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Amen.**