

**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 1:2-10**

<sup>1:2</sup> When the LORD first spoke through Hosea, the LORD said to Hosea, "Go, take for yourself a wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom, for the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the LORD." <sup>3</sup> So he went and took Gomer daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son. <sup>4</sup> And the LORD said to him, "Name him Jezreel; for in a little while I will punish the house of Jehu for the blood of Jezreel, and I will put an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel. <sup>5</sup> On that day I will break the bow of Israel in the valley of Jezreel." <sup>6</sup> She conceived again and bore a daughter. Then the LORD said to him, "Name her Lo-ruhamah, for I will no longer have pity on the house of Israel or forgive them. <sup>7</sup> But I will have pity on the house of Judah, and I will save them by the LORD their God; I will not save them by bow, or by sword, or by war, or by horses, or by horsemen." <sup>8</sup> When she had weaned Lo-ruhamah, she conceived and bore a son. <sup>9</sup> Then the LORD said, "Name him Lo-ammi, for you are not my people and I am not your God." <sup>10</sup> Yet the number of the people of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea, which can be neither measured nor numbered; and in the place where it was said to them, "You are not my people," it shall be said to them, "Children of the living God."

**Commentary**

Hosea prophesied in Israel in the 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C. His book presents a provocative and troublesome image of God's love. His marriage and family become metaphors for God's relationship with God's people. The prophet Hosea felt God leading him to marry a promiscuous woman because the people of Israel had sought other gods (1:2). As Hosea saw it, the Israelites were religiously "promiscuous" because they worshipped the Canaanite ba'als, the Assyro-Babylonian goddess Ishtar, and local deities, as well as God. They had forgotten their exclusive covenant relationship forged at Sinai: "You shall have no other gods before me." (Exodus 20:2) Their real promiscuity centered around practice we know today as the combining of various religion's elements in one's belief or worship, a practice also referred to as "syncretism." The Israelites lived among neighbors whose customs and agricultural practices were long-standing, inseparable from their culture and lifestyle, and believed effective in controlling the weather and protecting them from harm. They naturally and pragmatically adopted the cultural mores of these indigenous inhabitants. It took a prophet like Hosea to call them back to exclusive loyalty to God, their deliverer.

## Reflection

What aspects of our religious practice are more cultural than Christian? Which might be considered as unchristian or unfaithful by a prophet like Hosea? How do we determine the appropriate mix of what is cultural and what is Christian in our religious life and faith?

## Colossians 2:6-19

<sup>2:6</sup> As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live your lives in him, <sup>7</sup> rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. <sup>8</sup> See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the universe, and not according to Christ. <sup>9</sup> For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, <sup>10</sup> and you have come to fullness in him, who is the head of every ruler and authority. <sup>11</sup> In him also you were circumcised with a spiritual circumcision, by putting off the body of the flesh in the circumcision of Christ; <sup>12</sup> when you were buried with him in baptism, you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead. <sup>13</sup> And when you were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive together with him, when he forgave us all our trespasses, <sup>14</sup> erasing the record that stood against us with its legal demands. He set this aside, nailing it to the cross. <sup>15</sup> He disarmed the rulers and authorities and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in it. <sup>16</sup> Therefore do not let anyone condemn you in matters of food and drink or of observing festivals, new moons, or sabbaths. <sup>17</sup> These are only a shadow of what is to come, but the substance belongs to Christ. <sup>18</sup> Do not let anyone disqualify you, insisting on self-abasement and worship of angels, dwelling on visions, puffed up without cause by a human way of thinking, <sup>19</sup> and not holding fast to the head, from whom the whole body, nourished and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows with a growth that is from God.

## Commentary

The Greco-Roman world believed that the universe was ruled by hostile, capricious celestial powers that had to be placated by elaborate rituals (2:8). Apparently, some teachers in the Colossian church were advocating such practices as abstaining from certain food or drink, observing special festivals, abusing the body, and seeking assistance from heavenly beings to appease these powers. These syncretistic practices did not strengthen the Christian faith, but actually weakened it by diminishing the sense of full trust in Christ's redemptive work on the cross. The purpose of this passage is to remind the church that Christ is the head of the body, the church; and believers grow in him when they claim the gifts he has given and use them for the well-being of all.

## Reflection

What sources of security and well-being do we rely on out of our lack of faith in God's guidance and protection?

## **Luke 11:1-13**

<sup>11:1</sup> He was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples." <sup>2</sup> He said to them, "When you pray, say: Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. <sup>3</sup> Give us each day our daily bread. <sup>4</sup> And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us. And do not bring us to the time of trial." <sup>5</sup> And he said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; <sup>6</sup> for a friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him.' <sup>7</sup> And he answers from within, 'Do not bother me; the door has already been locked, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.' <sup>8</sup> I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, at least because of his persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs. <sup>9</sup> "So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. <sup>10</sup> For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. <sup>11</sup> Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? <sup>12</sup> Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion? <sup>13</sup> If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

### **Commentary**

After Jesus offers the crowd what we know today as, "The Lord's Prayer," the passage continues with two teachings that urge persistence in prayer. The parable of the friend at midnight presumes the Ancient Near Eastern etiquette of hospitality. Hosts were expected to provide for their own guests and to share with neighbors so they could care for their guests. If the needy host could not rouse his friend through the bonds of their relationship, his persistent shouts would shame the friend into providing service. In the same way, prayer can be honest and direct with God about what we need. Prayers do not have to be polite or nuanced references to what we want. The three imperatives—ask, search, and knock—even further give us permission to persist in prayer and trust that God will answer us. God promises a response if only we will ask, and God will ultimately bestow the greatest gift to sustain us in times that are good and bad: the Holy Spirit.

### **Reflection**

If God already knows what we need, what is the point of prayer? How do you deal with times where you ask, seek, and knock, but the response doesn't come as expected?

### **Responsive Psalter**

from **Psalm 85**

<sup>85:1</sup> LORD, you were favorable to your land;  
you restored the fortunes of Jacob.  
<sup>2</sup> **You forgave the iniquity of your people;  
you pardoned all their sin.**

- <sup>3</sup> You withdrew all your wrath;  
you turned from your hot anger.
- <sup>4</sup> **Restore us again, O God of our salvation,  
and put away your indignation toward us.**
- <sup>5</sup> Will you be angry with us forever?  
Will you prolong your anger to all generations?
- <sup>6</sup> Will you not revive us again,  
so that your people may rejoice in you?
- <sup>7</sup> **Show us your steadfast love, O LORD,  
and grant us your salvation.**
- <sup>8</sup> Let me hear what God the LORD will speak,  
for he will speak peace to his people,  
to his faithful, to those who turn to him in their hearts.
- <sup>9</sup> **Surely his salvation is at hand for those who fear him,  
that his glory may dwell in our land.**
- <sup>10</sup> Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet;  
righteousness and peace will kiss each other.
- <sup>11</sup> **Faithfulness will spring up from the ground,  
and righteousness will look down from the sky.**
- <sup>12</sup> The LORD will give what is good,  
and our land will yield its increase.
- <sup>13</sup> **Righteousness will go before him,  
and will make a path for his steps.**

### 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.**