

[Sermon Hosea 11, Cliff Carmody]

## Hosea 11:1-9

The Old Testament; law, order, punishment and suffering.... OR the New Testament; love, compassion, mercy and grace...Which one do you prefer to read?

For me, I like the Old Testament with its stories of the men and women of ancient times and their day-to-day struggles with knowing and understanding a God of law and order; BUT, I love the New Testament and the descriptions of the teachings of Jesus; an unwavering story of love, compassion, mercy and grace.

Is the God of the Old Testament different than the God of the New Testament?

Sometimes I get hung up on this question and struggle with the connections that exist between a loving, caring, merciful God and a God of law, order and punishment. I believe they co-exist in our God; I just need to look harder in God's word!

We tend to think love, compassion mercy and grace as New Testament ideas; I would argue they are not; they are in fact biblical ideas....the God of the Old Testament is the same God of the New Testament.

The question becomes can we have a God of laws, rules, punishment AND a God of love, compassion and mercy?

I know we can.....

A few weeks ago, the Men's Bible Study was discussing the Old Testament story of Moses; you know the story, the baby Moses is put in a basket in the river; found and raised by Pharaoh's daughter; realizes his Hebrew roots and is used by God to deliver his people from the land of Egypt!

Now, that is the abbreviated version; But how does this relate to our question of law, order, love and compassion?

Moses was a prophet...although it was a job he really didn't want!

What exactly is a prophet?

A prophet speaks "divinely inspired messages to others". A prophet sees the world through God's eyes; feels the world's pain through God's heart; and then, speaks Gods' Word to whatever situation God has directed them.

That is the upside of being a prophet; as we know, our human, sinful souls tend to take credit for the good things that happen to us and blame others, including God or the prophets, when things don't go the way we want them to.

Moses, the reluctant prophet of Israel; argues with God about his calling, is constantly and consistently dealing with a large mass of followers who continuously question his leadership, question

his motives, question his faith. They find new and creative ways to be sinful and wander from God's Word. He does all of this for a lifetime and then some. And at the end of it all, Moses doesn't get to enjoy the fruits of his effort.

Where is the love, compassion, mercy and grace in this story?

I love watching football....high school football, college football, professional football, AND above all else...Bison Football.

Randy Moss, the former Vikings and Patriots hall of famer does a little piece on ESPN called C'mon Man; the piece is all about reviewing football plays that make people scratch their heads.

I can almost see a similar version, a Randy Moss C'mon side to this story of Moses:

God to Moses – you are my chosen one, to lead my people out of Egypt;

Moses to God – C'mon Man, what am I going to say to Pharaoh; I am slow of speech and tongue; please send someone else....

Moses goes to the mountain to pray and talk to God; God gives Moses the Ten Commandments as a sign of his covenant with the people of Israel; in the meantime, the Israelites, in the absence of Moses fall away from the promise of God and deliverance.

Moses to the People – C'mon Man, all I do is keep working on your behalf with God; trying to make a better life for you and look what you do; I am gone for a few days and this is what I come back to; running wild, worshiping idols, sinning against God. C'mon Man!

And finally, after continued wandering, and years of anger and frustration in leading God's people through the wilderness; Moses makes a mistake that leads him to not obeying God's instructions, as a result, Moses will be denied the opportunity to enter into the Promised Land.....

C'mon Man...life is hard for a prophet and the story of Moses shows us this difficulty!

At the Men's Bible Study, we talked about the question of love, compassion, mercy and grace in relationship to the story of Moses. We landed on finding nuggets of love, compassion, mercy and grace in the ending....

Moses did the job that was asked of him; he delivered God's people to the promised land! The fruits of his effort were in knowing he had fulfilled God's prophetic purpose and was now free to let go of the burden of leading these sinful Israelites.

Our answer left me feeling the same way many Old Testament stories can make me feel; longing for a little more clarity; a little more focus; a little more emphasis on the love, compassion, mercy and grace so obvious in the New Testament.

Thankfully, this is not the end of our story....we know, for years and years, generation upon generation, God's people continued to sin and continued to wander away from obeying his commandments.

And God continued to be angry and frustrated at the behavior of the Israelites.

Our gospel lesson today introduces us to a new prophet, the Prophet Hosea...a prophet called by God to help Israel understand and change their sinful ways.

Suffice it to say, God is really ticked off with the behavior of his people.

Like Moses, this prophet business is a hard line of work for Hosea; at the beginning, Hosea's story starts much in the same way as Moses story, but as the story unfolds; our gospel lesson depicts a much clearer understanding of the love, compassion, mercy and grace found in the Old Testament.

God tells Hosea to marry a prostitute named Gomer and to name each of their three children very different names;

The first child's name means "to plant" because the people of Israel have planted the seeds of their own suffering;

The second child's name means "not loved";

And the third child's name means "not my people";

Remember, a prophet speaks "divinely inspired messages to others"....this is what God was saying, through the prophet Hosea to his people:

"Go, marry a promiscuous woman and have children with her, for like an adulterous wife this land is guilty of unfaithfulness to the Lord" (Hosea 1:2-3)

Your first child's name will tell the people of Israel that "I will put an end to the kingdom of Israel"; your second child's name will tell the people of Israel "I will no longer show love to Israel"; and your third child's name will tell the people of Israel "you are not my people and I am not your God."

Wow – God is really ticked off?

Shouldn't the people of Israel understand this; shouldn't we understand the impact OUR behavior has on the relationship we have with God?...C'mon Man!

This is not the first time God has been frustrated with the behavior of his people. The Old Testament is full of stories of law, order, punishment and suffering.

So, why do we struggle with a God who expects obedience to the law; while also being loving, merciful and compassionate?

We can begin to find the answer in today's Gospel lesson from the prophet Hosea.

Remember a prophet sees the world through God's eyes and feels the world through God's heart. This is key to understand what Hosea is telling us!

Hosea is describing the pain and agony GOD is seeing and feeling from God's viewpoint...not ours!

*When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. But the more they were called, the more they went away from me.*

*It was I who taught them to walk...they did not realize it was I who healed them. I led them with cords of kindness, with ties of love.*

A beautiful description of God's love for his people and commitment to their covenant; and yet, it also shows God's frustration with their actions and behavior; should they be punished?

*Will they not return to Egypt... because they refuse to repent? A sword will flash in their cities; it will devour their false prophets and put an end to their plans. My people are determined to turn from me.*

Hosea continues to describe God's anguish and the inner conflict God is feeling by telling us God **WILL NOT** give up on his people; nor will he give up on us; even though we are sinful and do not deserve his love...

*My heart is changed within me...my compassion is aroused...I will not carry out my fierce anger...*

*For I am GOD, and no mortal, the Holy One in your midst, and I will not come in wrath.*

Hosea helps us to understand that God is not like us....God CHOOSES us, even when we don't choose him; the Kingdom of God is "in our midst" and we can rest assured that our GOD "will not come with anger and wrath".

Like a parent, with unconditional love for their child; struggling with their child's choices and behaviors, Hosea describes for us a loving God, a caring God, whose enduring grace in this old testament passage shows us that the answer to our question of law and order; love and compassion is found throughout the bible; not an old testament OR new testament promise; but an old AND new testament promise; a biblical promise that defines for us a complete relationship with God!

"For it is by grace that you have been saved, through faith...and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God." (Ephesians 2:8)

Thanks be to God!