



## MOTHER'S DAY

### LECTIONARY COMMENTARY

**Sunday, May 12, 2013**

**Stacey L. Edwards-Dunn, Guest Lectionary Commentator**  
Executive Minister, Trinity United Church of Christ, Chicago Illinois

**Lecture – Hosea 11:1-9 (New Revised Standard Version)**

(v. 1) When Israel was a child,  
and out of Egypt I called my son.

(v. 2) The more I called them,  
the more they went from me;  
they kept sacrificing to the Baals,  
and offering incense to idols.

(v. 3) 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.

(v. 4) 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.

(v. 5) They shall return to the land of Egypt,  
and Assyria shall be their king,  
because they have refused to return to me.

(v. 6) The sword rages in their cities,  
it consumes their oracle-priests,  
and devours because of their schemes.

(v. 7) My people are bent on turning away from me.  
To the Most High they call,  
but he does not raise them up at all.

(v. 8) 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.

(v. 9) 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.

## I. Description of the Liturgical Moment

The Black mother, whether biological, adopted, or mother by circumstance, has been the cornerstone of the black family and the black community as she has survived all types of adversity such as forced labor, beatings, bombings, rape, lynching, and a holocaust that was intended not to kill her but to rape her of her dignity, determination, and personhood. She raised babies that were hers and not hers, cooked foods that fed our souls and the multitudes, navigated menopause and mid-life crises, wiped her children's tears and sat down on the bus, watched her men be killed and her children being sold, walked the thin line between sanity and insanity as she gave so much of herself and sometimes failed to experience love in return.

On Mother's Day, we take specific time to honor our mothers. We honor those mothers, young and old, unmarried or married, who have given birth to children biologically and those who have served as the mothers to children they did not give birth to but has given life to. It is on Mother's Day that we honor their gifts, presence, faith, sacrifice, strength, silent tears, accomplishments, and their love. Our mothers are one of the greatest gifts from God to us.

## II. Biblical Interpretation for Preaching and Worship: Hosea 11:1-9

### Part I: The Contemporary Contexts of the Interpreter

I have to admit that I been blessed with a beautiful gift, my mother, “Mama” as I affectionately call her. From the moment I was born, my mother has loved me, nurtured me, inspired me, imparted wisdom to me, cried with me, worried about me, educated me, sacrificed for me, gave to me, mentored me, listened to me, walked with me, and ushered me into a relationship with God. A woman of great faith, a fabulous cook, and an amazing homemaker, my mother was not only a mother to my brothers and sisters, all of whom she taught to cook, sew, and take care of ourselves, but she also served as a mother and mentor to other women including my foster sisters and children of the community. I recognize that not all children have had the opportunity to experience the love, embrace, and nature of the one called mother. Thus, I do not take for granted the blessing that I have in my mother who has served as a rock and a cornerstone in my life since birth. The blessing of being mothered well cannot be overstated.

If I were preaching on Mother’s Day, I’d consider the following:

### **Possible Sermon Titles**

- The Power of a Mama’s Love
- A Mother’s Unfailing Love
- When Mama Was God
- Never Forget Mama
- Mama Never Quits

### **Possible Sermon Moves/Points**

#### *When Mama Was God:*

1. She gave her love at birth
2. She carried your burdens
3. She had your back

#### *Mama Never Quits:*

1. Loving You
2. Teaching You
3. Challenging You

#### *Never Forget Mama’s*

1. Love for You
2. Mercy for You
3. Hope for You

### **Part II: Biblical Commentary**

In our text for today, Hosea writes about having been mothered by God. Hosea, whose name means salvation, is the writer of the first book of the Minor Prophets. The book was written in the 8th century B.C., during the reign of Uzziah in Judah and Jeroboam II in Israel, as well as during the time when Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah were kings over

Judah. Scholars suggest Hosea's prophetic ministry covered more than seventy years, during which time he directed warnings and passionate pleas directly toward the house of Israel to get them to repent and return to God. The Israelites had made alliances with foreign powers and participated in corrupt worship of idol gods which resulted in a lack of integrity, disobedience, and violated their commitment to and covenant with the Lord.

Hosea sets up this section of his prophecy by calling attention to Israel's early history. He reminds Israel that despite their present condition of rebellion against God, God nevertheless would not abandon them. God would love them with an enduring love, a suffering love, the kind of love that a parent has for a child.

The narration of such a profound love takes place through a backwards glance to the story of Israel's exodus from ancient Egypt and perhaps more distantly still, to the story of Abraham's call to leave Ur of the Chaldees (cf. Gen. 12). In recounting the exodus saga, Hosea conjures imagery of God as the loving parent who has always cared for Israel. In fact, Israel's existence as a people is not rooted in biology or blood. It is rooted in this call, a call that brings them into existence as a people. Ancient Israel is a people whose very life is rooted in the call of God, which gives them life. This call of God is a call of love.

Reflecting on the historical account of God's deliverance of the Hebrews out of Egypt, Hosea opens chapter eleven with an image that offers readers a glimpse of God's relationship with Israel as a parent to the children of Israel (v. 1). It is easy for a reader of the Western world to interpret this text from a patriarchal perspective and assume that the parent is a father speaking to a child. However, close inspection of the text implies a woman's care. That is to say, in this text, one can find the Divine laying aside fatherly attributes and exhibiting the unyielding, faithful, and enduring love of a mother who is hurt and sorrowed by her child's disobedience, rebellion, and bad decisions.

For instance, in verse 3, God's goodness is expressed toward a child as a mother or a caregiver. Additionally, verse four utilizes language that many would think describes the strength of strong man lifting or carrying a child. However, it was most often the role of a mother to feed a child in the Hebrew home. These two instances and others throughout the text not only give witness to a mother's love, but also point to the maternal character of God in our lives as witnessed in the manner in which our mothers care for us.

- a. God's long memory of where we've been and where we are now displays how far-reaching is the love of God for us.
- b. God's calling us out of the places of bondage that would seek to confine us and God's showing us a new purpose display the parental love of God for us.
- c. God's coming alongside us, as does a parent, to guide in how to walk and healing or picking us up when we fall, patching up the bruises and the many deep wounds to our sense of self—all this displays the parental and motherly love of God for us.

- d. God's sticking by us even when we don't give God due acknowledgment, just as we often don't give the mothers in our lives acknowledgment for what they do—this too displays the motherly love and affection of God for us.

In verses 5-7, we find God angry as God announces that Israel will be punished for its faithlessness and will become enslaved to the Assyrians as they were in Egypt. Yes, even mothers are angered by bad, disobedient behavior. But, be clear, this is not God's doing; as a mother would be apt to say, they (Israel) made this bed and now they get to sleep in it.

However, this text reminds us on Mother's Day that mothers are witnesses of God in our midst, witnesses of the faithfulness of God. In the many displays of motherhood today, we have before us pointers to God's divine and redeeming, God's protective and covenantal parentage and motherhood. The mothers in our midst, in our expanded understanding of motherhood, display the veritable motherhood of God—you mothers before us today are a revelation of God's fidelity or faithfulness and God's indomitable and restoring love. From you we get a glimpse of God's even greater parental care and provision and love for us all today.

- a. We can rest assured that, like a parent, no matter where we've been or what we've been caught up in, God fundamentally is a God who embraces and receives us. God will not let us suffer destruction.
- b. We can rejoice that God's ultimate and final judgment is the judgment of mother-affirming love.
- c. In fact, God will even have a change of heart so that we can repent (have a change of heart).

Although they must pay the consequences for their actions, verses 8-9 reveal to us a change in the heart of God. Verse 9 states that God cannot carry out God's anger toward Ephraim and destroy them because God is our mother! Thus, in spite of God's anger and disappointment, God closes out verse 9 by offering a hope and restoration for Israel once they have experienced their punishment. Like God, as a result of their love, black mothers experiences have often been escorted by pain, disappointment, and frustration. However, like God, because of the love that runs deep in their veins, they have still been able to see the greater possibilities in us and offer us hope for our future.

## Celebration

What do we learn from Hosea's story about the divine gift of mother love—a mother-love and a divine-love that we see displayed by God's love in Hosea's prophecy? We discover in this story a love that just won't quit, a love that won't give up. It's a boundless love. A restoring love. A compassionate love. It's a mother love, a love that is far stronger than the chords of biology. It's the kind of love that God as Creator has for

us, God's creation. It's a love that reaches us in the depths of the dark night of difficulty and despondency.

It's the love of God with Us. The God who is with us in the darkness and from that place grants us a new glimpse of God's glory. It's the love of God with Us. And with this love we're granted to see that God has not abandoned us and that because God has not abandoned us, God is still with us.

This Mother's Day, we remember our mothers who loved us, gave birth to us, gave us life, carried us, and gave us hope. Mothers who did not listen to the world say that we were 3/5 of a person or worthless because our skin had been kissed by nature's sun. No, these mothers saw something greater in us and a greater future for us. Mothers such as Rosa Parks sat down for us. Mothers like Harriet Tubman freed us. Mothers like Sojourner Truth stood up for us. Mothers like Mary McLeod Bethune educated us. Today, we praise God for our mothers who have overwhelmed us with their love, gave us hope, and were always on our side, just as was our Savior, Jesus Christ. That's God's word to us today this Mother's Day.

### **Descriptive Details**

The descriptive details of this passage include:

**Sights:** A mother with her hands on her hips; a child walking; a proud mother; a mother picking up a child; dust; a child engaging in bad behavior;

**Smells:** The smell of sweat; burned incense; and

**Sounds:** A crying baby; an infant stumbling when learning how to walk; children eating; a mother raising her voice.

### **III. Additional Resources for Preachers**

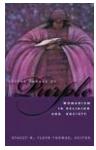
#### **Books**



Carney Smith, Jessie. Powerful Black Women. Detroit: Visible Ink Press, 1996.



hooks, bell. Sisters of the Yam: Black Women and Self-Recovery. Boston: South End Press, 1993.



Floyd-Thomas, Stacey M., ed. Deeper Shades of Purple: Womanism in Religion and Society. New York and London: New York University Press, 2006.

## **Music**

- Dear Momma by Tupac Shakur
- Mamma Loves Me by Jay Z
- A Song for Mama by Boys to Men
- No Greater Love by Fred Hammond

## **Poems**

- Still I Rise by Maya Angelo
- The Mother Poem by Mitchell M. Gissendanner
- Mother to Son by Langston Hughes
- The Negro Mother by Langston Hughes

## **Movies**

- Soul Food
- For Colored Girls

## **Quotes about Mothers**

Mama was my greatest teacher, a teacher of compassion, love and fearlessness. If love is sweet as a flower, then my mother is that sweet flower of love.

—Stevie Wonder

My mother never gave up on me. I messed up in school so much they were sending me home all the time, but my mother sent me right back.

—Denzel Washington