

## Sermon: Resting on the Big Picture

Year C, Proper 13

[Hosea 11:1-11](#); [Psalm 107:1-9,43](#); [Ecclesiastes 1:2, 12-14](#); [2:18-23](#); [Psalm 49:1-12](#);  
[Colossians 3:1-11](#); [Luke 12:13-21](#)

Offered August 18, 2019 to Brookline Community Church, Brookline, NH  
Rev. Catherine A. Merrill

[Luke 12:13-21, but before the hymn]

So before we even get to the hymn, while the Luke reading is fresh in your mind, I want to ask some questions. I know, the next time you guys go to hire a minister, your first question is going to be, “Can you follow what’s printed in the bulletin?”. So I’m going to ask some questions and you’re going to answer them. Doesn’t need to be perfect.

So the rich guy has a good harvest and has more crops than will fit in his barns. He decides to tear down his barns and build bigger ones. A clearly that’s not what we’re supposed to do. So what should he have done? Not plant as much, let some of it rot in the fields?

So the problem is when he says to himself: *you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.* (Luke 12:19). It’s not the goods that are the problem. It’s what he’s doing with them.

What if he says, great harvest, I’m going to build the bigger barns, store it up and share with everyone, so everyone knows my name, everyone owes me a favor.

What if he says, great harvest, bigger barns, store it up and share with everyone and when it gets handed out, I’m going to say that this is what the Lord God requires of us.

What if he says, great harvest, bigger barns, store it up and share with everyone and when it gets handed out say “I had a good year this year. I can remember what it was like when the harvest wasn’t anywhere near ready but we were running out from the year before. It matters to me that my neighbors not go hungry. I’d appreciate if you’d just take this off my hands.”

So the issue with the goods in the barns is not the goods in the barns, it’s how the goods in the barns lets us lose sight of the bigger picture. It takes us away from where we’re heading.

So let’s sing together #441 “Softly and Tenderly Jesus is Calling”

[#441 “Softly and Tenderly Jesus is Calling” & Hosea 11:1-11]

As a prophet, Hosea sees under the present, he names what the people are numb to, he puts into words their unspoken hopes and he provides a symbol. At the time of Hosea, Israel has split into two kingdoms, the smaller Southern Kingdom centered on Jerusalem and the much larger Northern Kingdom with a capital in Samaria. The Northern Kingdom is being invaded by Assyria. The king of the Northern Kingdom is looking to form an alliance with Egypt to fight to keep the Assyrians from invading Israel. Because the reason the Assyrians are invading Israel is really to get to the agricultural surpluses of Egypt.

So, on the face of it, there’s a very plain argument to be made. “Are you out of your ever-loving mind? We were *slaves* in Egypt. The very last thing we want to do is get into some kind of alliance with them because we know how that works out. We’ll be slaves for them again. In fact, if the value of the alliance is to keep Assyria out of Egypt, then where is most of the fighting and dying and destruction going to happen? Not in Egypt.”

While that may be logical, and even a compelling argument, that's not prophetic. And it's not what Hosea is saying.

What Hosea says is, "C'mon pumpkin, C'mon, I know you can do it. Come to papa. That's right. Another big step." What Hosea says is, "*Lullay, mine Liking, my dear Son, mine Sweeting, Lullay, my dear heart, mine own dear darling.*" Hosea holds up a symbol that is so familiar, so tender, so full of love that we can recognize it in our own selves and our own children. And Hosea does it in such a way that we can all see ourselves in that image, men and women, because he shares the image from the parent's point of view. Is God a Father or a Mother in those images? Yes. Both. Either. And so loving.

Is this the grief that Hosea's people are numb to? Is this the hope that Hosea's people don't dare put into words? They are a small country, a poor country. They are caught between two powerful adversaries, so chances are very good they're going to be trampled no matter how it turns out. *The sword rages in their cities, it consumes their oracle-priests, and devours* (Hosea 11:6). Their nightly news is full of politicians who are making strange alliances rather than dealing with the reality of daily life. Violence is rising all around them. The old ways are disappearing and there seems to be some kind of void that needs to be filled with sacrifices to Baals and incense to idols (Hosea 11:2), needs to be filled with Facebook and Youtube.

What are they grieving for? What are they longing for? I think we know. *You restore my soul and you give me rest. He leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul* (Psalm 23:2-3). But they have lost the bigger picture. So instead of running toward God, they are running away. They are not the Prodigal Son, realizing the mess he has made with his bad decisions.<sup>1</sup> They are determined to turn away from God (Hosea 11:7). They want rest, they want peace so badly they are willing to believe that sacrificing to Baals, burning incense before idols, forming an alliance with the Egyptians of all people will bring that peace. They have lost the bigger picture and they are breaking God's heart.

If the rich man with the crops in the barn was blinded by the crops he had, what are they blinded by? By imagining that they can take some action that can give them rest, bring them peace. I'm not saying that you walk away and say, "Nothing to do with me. It's in God's hands." I'm saying you start with the bigger picture. Of a God who was tender and gentle with a toddler. Of a God lifting an infant to God's cheek. If you want rest, you have to go where rest is, which is with God. If you want your soul to *relax, eat, drink, be merry* (Luke 12:19), then you have to go where that is truly possible, with God.

When we talk about stewardship, we talk about a bunch of different things, but all of them spring from holding onto that bigger picture. That *God is God and no mortal, the Holy One in our midst, and God will not come in wrath* (Hosea 11:9). That God is God and no mortal and that we are mortals and not God. God may roar like a lion over our heads and scare the starch out of us (Hosea 11:10), but God loves us and won't abandon us. Whatever we lay up in this world, however we try to rest from the concerns of this world, whatever we try to do to restore our souls, we have to go home first. We have to go home to God. Stewardship is about how we choose to insure that the bigger picture shows up in all our actions as a community.

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<sup>1</sup> Stacey Simpson Duke, "Proper 13, Pastoral Perspective, Hosea 11:1-11" in *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary, Year C, Volume 3*, ed. David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, [Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010], 296.

Because when we keep ahold of that bigger picture, when we remember that God loves us dearly and will care for us, will restore our soul and give us rest, when we remember that, *then we shall come trembling like birds from Egypt, and like doves from the land of Assyria; and God will return us to our homes* (Hosea 11:11).