
Meditation on Hosea 1:1-11

'Cords of Kindness'

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. [Phil 1,2] Amen.

∴ ONE ∴

My dear sisters and brothers,

We're right in the middle of a time where we hear from many different Old Testament – or as you can also say: First Testament – prophets.

We have heard about Amos and the fruit basket,
Isaiah and the potter,
Elisha and Naaman,
Elijah and the sound of sheer silence.

And as last week, today we will here again from Hosea. But today it is about a very different prophetic image.

We hear about God relating to Israel, to his people as a parent to his child.

Remarkably enough, we are to get insight into God's inner world of emotions.

Hearing the words of Hosea reminds me so much of how I can be triggered by my children in a way, that only they can.

::: TWO :::

Listen to Hosea, chapter 11:

*1 "When Israel was a child, I loved him,
and out of Egypt I called my son.*

*2 But the more they were called,
the more they went away from me.
They sacrificed to the Baals
and they burned incense to images.*

*3 It was I who taught Ephraim to walk,
taking them by the arms;
but they did not realize
it was I who healed them.*

*4 I led them with cords of human kindness,
with ties of love.*

*To them I was like one who lifts
a little child to the cheek,
and I bent down to feed them.*

Right from the time when Israel was formed as a people, God loved him – as a parent loves his own child.

And right from the beginning this people, the children of God are called. The children of God are called, because they are loved.

Now, there in relationship to children this strange contradiction occurs which is described in these words: *But the more they were called, the more they went away from me.*

You only wish for the best of your child. You call them, try to teach them how to behave in a good and respectful way.

But the child feels overwhelmed by demands and requests, constrained by rules – and turns away.

What a remarkable notice on what can happen even in a relationship of love, shaped by respect of the parent and the free will and self-responsibility of the child...

And usually – again – we might find ourselves on both sides of the relationship.

::: THREE :::

Let us listen again to Hosea:

*5 “Will they not return to Egypt
and will not Assyria rule over them
because they refuse to repent?*

*6 A sword will flash in their cities;
it will devour their false prophets
and put an end to their plans.*

*7 My people are determined to turn from me.
Even though they call me God Most High,
I will by no means exalt them.*

The calamity can be foreseen.

The disaster can be expected.

That’s how this passage reads.

How strange, how contradictory.

The parent wishes for the best of the beloved child. The child can only see the narrowness – and turns away.

Verse 7 in this passage is hard to translate. Different translations are given, where different decisions are made on which to emphasize.

In what I have read to you from the New International Version, the emphasize is again on God's emotions.

God's words are rendered here like this:

*Even though they call me God Most High,
I will by no means exalt them.*

These are words spoken out of sheer disappointment and resignation.

But it is not the end. It seems like God lifts his face, and new hope comes back. Just like when parents come to their senses and say: No, I can't let it go like this!

::: FOUR :::

Hosea's words:

*8 "How can I give you up, Ephraim?
How can I hand you over, Israel?
How can I treat you like Admah?
How can I make you like Zeboyim?
My heart is changed within me;
all my compassion is aroused.*

*9 I will not carry out my fierce anger,
nor will I devastate Ephraim again.*

*For I am God, and not a man—
the Holy One among you.
I will not come against their cities.*

We hear the questions:

- How can I give you up?
- How can I hand you over?

And the answer is: I can't!

*My heart is changed within me;
all my compassion is aroused.*

Cords of Kindness – here we become witnesses of what this exactly means.

*My heart is changed within me;
all my compassion is aroused.*

Here we are at the core of how love – God's love to his people – is shaped.

God doesn't just go by the law or by the rules,
he doesn't just measure good and bad,
he doesn't just count.

He loves.

And that's why his heart is changed – disregarding all disappointments before, looking for a new foundation for the relationship.

::: FIVE :::

Do you hear these words:

*My heart is changed within me;
all my compassion is aroused.*

Do you hear that this is a word for us?

Do you hear that this is also about our cords of kindness?

We hear about how God is ready to allow for a new start of a relationship.

Do you know about a situation, a relationship where your heart needs to be changed, where your compassion needs to be aroused?

God's heart can be changed and his compassion can be aroused?

He can enable the same in you?

A new hear, a new compassion where you desperately need it.

::: SIX :::

Hosea's words which conclude this section:

*10 They will follow the Lord;
he will roar like a lion.*

*When he roars,
his children will come trembling from the west.
11 They will come from Egypt,
trembling like sparrows,
from Assyria, fluttering like doves.
I will settle them in their homes,"
declares the Lord.*

Very abruptly we hear about God roaring like a lion. But here, it is not fear or danger which is to be expressed.

God roaring like a lion depicts his strong voice being able to call his beloved children back from where they have been scattered to their home.

Back to the mother lion who will protect them whatever the future will hold.

::: SEVEN :::

And in the end, God's people will find their home in him.

*I will settle them in their homes,"
declares the Lord.*

So, if your heart is without rest.
If you feel scattered,
be sure that God's arms are wide open for you,
like the good father's arms...,
be sure that he will lift you up again,
like the mother lifts her child to her cheeks.

What a miracle that we can be people of love,
whose hearts can be changed,
whose compassion is aroused,
so that we can act –
as God acts upon us
through cords of kindness.

Amen.