

Be Christ

[Hosea 11:1-11](#)

[Colossians 3:1-11](#)

[Luke 12:13-21](#)

When I first saw the headlines this morning I thought they had revised the death count from the shooting in El Paso yesterday, then I realized. Another shooting, this time in Dayton, Ohio. Both hard on the heels of the tragedy in Gilroy last Sunday.

There are no words for the pain and anguish the families of the victims are experiencing today. And the sadness of a culture where our young men seek immortality in death and killing – a culture of death and violence, where our television shows, our virtual games and our international policy all glorify war and killing.

Let us take a moment in silence to send our love to those affected in Gilroy, El Paso and Dayton, and to any young men who may be planning similar violence.

...

And through Hosea, God says,

The more I called them,
the more they went from me;

they kept sacrificing to the Baals,
and offering incense to idols.

Yet it was I who taught [them] to walk,
I took them up in my arms;
but they did not know that I healed them.

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.

...because they have refused to return to me,

The gun rages in their cities,
it consumes their oracle-priests,
and devours because of their schemes.

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

Sending our thoughts and prayers are just useless platitudes unless we follow them up with action for change. The people God was speaking to through Hosea were praying but it was not enough because they were not making the changes they needed to make. At the same time that they were praying they were turning away from God. Prayer without action is empty because it is not really prayer. When we pray for rain but don't prepare for rain, it is clear that we don't expect our prayer to be heard.

You know that the definition of insanity is to do the same thing but expect different results. The people of Hosea's time were caught up in that insanity. And so are the people of America today. We want to end gun violence but we cannot agree to limit guns. We want all beings to live in peace and justice but we stop them coming here because it might disturb our own comfort and then we exalt in our own privilege, tolerating racial slurs against those who are different. We want to leave our children a livable planet but we are too apathetic to make the enormous changes that are needed. Thoughts and prayers alone are not enough.

Please do not hear me saying that prayer is pointless. It isn't; prayer is powerful. But if it is not accompanied by us doing what we can to change the situation then it is just an attempt to shift responsibility. Prayer without action is like Pilate washing his hands.

God longs for humanity to return to her. That passage from Hosea is full of the longing of a parent for a child to flourish and to return his or her love. God loves us as tenderly as we have ever loved another human or a beloved pet. As members of the Jesus movement, we live in two worlds. There is the world in which we are totally children of God, caught up in that limitless love and then there's the world of today's headlines.

In the second lesson today, the one from Colossians, we heard, "you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory." (Col 3:2). Our lives are hidden with Christ in God and will be revealed when Christ is revealed. On the surface that doesn't make a great deal of sense. My life is very much here and now. I live in Los Osos and serve and worship among y'all. So how can my life be hidden in Christ?

Again and again as we ponder the message of Jesus and his early followers, we see this double reality. Yes, this is my life – the one where I get out of bed, finish a sermon, have breakfast and come to church.

But this life will not go on for ever. This is temporary. My permanent life – and yours too – is tied up with Christ in that filial relationship.

It's easy to forget that. It's easy to think that this is all there is. If this is all there is, then there is no reason to live with an ethic of restraint. Like the guy in Jesus' story, the best thing to do is to get as much as you can for yourself and your family – he who dies with the most toys wins. Why not go out and shoot up a shopping mall or break up a party with a gun?

But the reality is that there is a lot more going on than meets the eye. When we were baptized or when we first met the Christ, we enrolled in the reign of God - we agreed to make manifest the filial relationship that the whole of Creation enjoys with the Christ. We decided to live as if the God in all things actually matters.

Last week I shared with you some of the thinking of Roman Catholic theologian Raimon Panikkar. I mentioned that Panikkar has talked about the relationship between Jesus Christ and the Creator as *filial* which comes from the Latin word for son. This filial relationship is one in which Jesus can say "I am in the Father and the Father is in me." "anyone who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). Creator and Christ, father and son are so close that they are one and yet they are different. Panikkar goes on to say that the relationship between Christ and Creation is similarly filial – Creation is in Christ and Christ is in Creation. As humans are an important part of creation we too share that filial relationship with Christ and therefore with God.

The filial relationship which we have with God in Christ calls us to live as Christ in the world. There is a huge ethical dimension to our life in Christ. We are the children of the Living God and the way we do everyday life here and now is the actualization of that inner state. Jesus' life was all about making the inner relationship an outer reality; about showing us how to live in the filial relationship we have with God through Christ. His path took him into direct confrontation with the sin matrix and eventually to his death. But his resurrection just confirms that there is more to life than we can see. Living in Christ is not about being good so that we go to heaven. It's not about the afterlife at all. It's about being Christ in the world. It's about being in close loving relationship with God.

And that means living our Christ-selves at work, at home, wherever we are, and especially in our minds.

The writer to the Colossians gives a list of things for us to think about. "Put to death, therefore, whatever in you is earthly: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed (which is idolatry).... you must get rid of all such things-- anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive language from your mouth. Do not lie to one another."

I wonder whether he would make the same list today. Perhaps we can see the root of today's violence in that list – perhaps it comes from evil desire and greed. I might add jealousy, a desire to have more, and apathy. These are not a list of things to avoid if you want to go to heaven but a list to help you think about where and how you are not yet living fully in Christ.

The writer to the Colossians seems to be speaking to the church as individuals, but Hosea was speaking to the nation. Just as we are members of Christ *and* operating in this world, so too we are individuals operating in a wider society.

I encourage you today to think about how you can live out your filial relationship with God in Christ in your citizenship as well as in your personal relationships. What steps can you take to re-orient this society of ours so that we can live in justice and peace, respecting the dignity of every human being and caring for this fragile planet?

Social change often starts and grows in small ways. The personal *is* political. The choices we make do have an impact. And so does what we put on our Facebook page, what we say to our friends, the calls we make to our congressional representatives and the letters we write to the Editor.

As well as sending our thoughts and prayers, let us **be** Christ for the world.