

He had it all together. He was a Dean's list student. He had a nice apartment near the university. He had lots of friends, some of them girls! He had a car that had been given him. He had a job so he had spending money. He had it all together.

But, something did not add up. Something did not match up. He had it all together but where was he going? What was he going to do with all this that he had – stuff and ability, abundance and talent. And the day was drawing near when he would have to answer that question – what are you going to do with yourself – with all this that is in your hands and that is at your disposal?

This was the question of his life – not just “what are you going to do?” but even bigger and deeper – “who are you to do anything – how do you know what to do with the person that you are?”

In this great passage from Hosea we see a picture of God as a loving, kind and nurturing presence – almost a mothering kind of image, “I was to them,” Hosea means the Hebrews as they were saved from Egypt, and became a nation and a kingdom, “I was to them like those who lift infants to their cheeks. I bent down and fed them.”

It is a sweet image – love and care that is given because God loves and cares. God loves each one of us and cares for us. Potential and promise is given, even stuff and possessions.

The person in Jesus' parable has received all this, and he has worked hard – and he has ideas about what to do with it. He is going to conserve it for himself.

And the people of God in Hosea's time – they have decided to use what has come to them, their potential and promise, as they like – like the man in the parable – all that has been given them they are using to increase their own power and their own share.

We may say, there's nothing wrong with that – why not?

But is this why God made us? Is this why we have been granted the gift of life? Just for me and all the gusto I can get out of life? Hosea intimates that this loving and nurturing God has a broader view of human life. God gave life, nurtured it, preserved it, enriched and encouraged life so that the very best of God's intentions might be lived out in us. So that through us and with us the world might be a better place than it would be without God's influence, without us.

Jesus' parable comes to an abrupt end. It feels like a damning judgment on the man. Isn't it meant, though, as a story to wake any of us up who hear it. There is an old line, often quoted, that I appreciate: "No one, on his deathbed, wishes he had spent more time at the office."

This passage from Hosea ends with a roaring lion. Hosea has spoken God's word just before saying God will not execute anger or come in wrath, that God's compassion is warm and tender, even over wandering and foolish people, even over a self-indulged and unfocused people. But the end is not a sweet pat on the head and a blind eye toward this lack of interest in what God wants – no – a roaring lion.

Some years ago our former Director of Christian Education, Kris Brammer, traveled to South Africa. In his last days there he went on a wildlife viewing safari and they slept in platform tents out in the grassland. Kris is a big fellow, but even he awoke with startled fear one night in his tent. He listened. Out in the night, not far away, was the deep rumble and then the loud roar of a lion. Kris said he went from lying down to standing up in one second. This was both terrifying and attention focusing. The roaring of the lion called upon every fiber of his being.

This is perhaps the greatest compassion God can show – to make us stop in our tracks and ponder the deep question of who we are and what are we up to with this life we have been given. This is the question for each of us. And it is the question for the church, for our church. The children’s song is correct, “Yes, Jesus loves me,” but no one who loves is going to simply let the ones they love go along without correction and guidance.

It made me think of Aslan, the lion in the CS Lewis books. The lion Aslan, who comes in self-sacrifice – a powerful sign, not of self-indulgence, but of self-giving, and of God’s deepest involvement in the affairs of human life. In the books the battle is arranged against those self-aggrandizing forces that tell the ancient lie – that this life is all about me; in his books CS Lewis wants to awaken in the reader a new focus on the energy toward that life-long quest of discovering what God means for us in granting us the gift of life – who are we to be and what are we to do in each chapter of our life, so that we may give God glory and joy, like children who fulfill a parent’s highest and greatest hopes.

At the Lord’s table we eat the feast that tells us about the Father’s only Son, who came, as he said, not to be served, but to serve. The one

who said, “greater love has no one, but to lay down his life for his friends.”

The one who calls us his friends and calls us then to follow him, to be his sisters and his brothers, the one who makes it possible for us to be children of God. The one who gives us a great commission to tell the good news to all the world, and who motivates us with the great imperative, we love, because God first loved us.

In the midst of life, in the challenges of our days; in perplexity and in certainty; as young, and old and in-between; in the night as we lay pondering and praying upon our beds, may we tune our ears for that lion’s roar, that clarifying note that focuses our attention upon the greatest and best use of the life we have been given as children of a powerful and loving God. Amen.