

Sermon Notes from the Church's Ministry Among Jewish People
Seventh Sunday after Pentecost – Year C

RCL Readings – Hosea 1:2-10; Psalm 85; Colossians 2:6-15; Luke 11:1-13

ACNA Readings – Genesis 18:20-33; Psalm 138; Colossians 2:6-15; Luke 11:1-13

Introduction. The word *sh'ma* in Hebrew means *hear*. However, it is also the biblical Hebrew word for *obey*. God speaks to every aspect of our lives, not only to our spiritual lives, and we need to hear the whole counsel of God. If we are honest with ourselves the word of the Lord is not always something we may want to hear. But it is definitely something we really do need to hear and subsequently put into practice.

Common Theme. In our readings this week we encounter the Lord speaking into the marriage life of a prophet, into the prayer life of Jewish disciples, and into the practical and theological life of a Gentile community. The Lord is not aloof from his creation. He is intimately interested and involved in all aspects of the lives of his people.

Hosea 1:2-10. In the opening chapter, the prophet Hosea – whose name shares a common root of the verb *to save* with the name of Jesus (Yeshua) – has received a word from the Lord. There is a pattern here that before the Lord asks us to speak to others he often speaks to us first. The initial word to Hosea affects his personal life: he is to marry a prostitute. This can't have been an easy message to receive. I am going to assume that Hosea would not have considered marriage to a harlot except through a divine word. Hosea then demonstrates to us his obedience to the Lord as he immediately acts to fulfil this difficult commandment. Jesus says we should be doers and not only hearers of the word. Hosea obediently puts the word into practice with his marriage to a woman who would be unfaithful, mimicking the Lord's own experience with Israel. The same word that reveals that an unfaithful Israel will hear the Lord declare 'I am not your God' also proclaims the promise of restoration in verse 10. In biblical theology, abandonment is not rejection. For a time the hand of the Lord will not protect his people, but this does not mean that God has forgotten them. Because in verse 10 God articulates again his promise to Abraham that the number of the children of Israel will be like the sand of the sea. Unfaithful Israel will once again be known as children of the Living God.

Psalm 85. Biblically the people of Israel are intimately bonded to the land of Israel. This is reflected here as the sons of Korah begin this psalm by pairing the favour of the Lord to the land with the restored fortunes of Jacob (the people of Israel). The people receive forgiveness for their iniquities in conjunction with their return from exile. Much of the psalm is a declaration from the worshipper of what the Lord has done and an appeal to the benevolent love of God to bring salvation and not indignation. In verses 8 and 9, the psalmist has the worshipper declare a pledge that he or she will hear what the Lord will say. There is the confidence that the Lord will speak peace. Still, the psalmist prays that the people will not backslide. We each need to pledge that we will hear with humble and repentant hearts what the Lord says and then have the courage to do what we have heard.

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Colossians 2:6-15. The Colossians have been hearing mixed messages. Paul wants to remind them of the foundational teachings they received through the preaching of Epaphras (Col 1:7) and admonishes them to walk (*περιπατέω, peripateo*) this faith out. Remember what you heard and learnt at the beginning and do that, says Paul! What other messages have the Colossians been hearing? It's possible that the community in Colossae was being challenged by gnostic thought of some kind, marked by an emphasis on philosophy. Commentators are all perplexed at exactly what philosophies Paul is addressing here because he doesn't tell us what they are. Philosophy in and of itself is not inherently evil. There is such a thing as Christian philosophy. Paul is warning the Colossians against a secular, non-biblical teaching which has both a physical side (the traditions of men) and a spiritual side (the elemental spirits of the world). The world will consistently bombard us with messages attacking our identity, our faith, challenging our families and our futures. We need to be reminded of the 'faith once received', that is, the good news we heard in the beginning that brought us into a living relationship with the Messiah. That faith cannot remain as something philosophical in our minds but needs to be cemented in our hearts through the walk (*peripateo*) of faith. This will help guard us against the myriad of counter philosophies that confuse and confound us from hearing and practicing the revealed Word of God.

Luke 11:1-13. The disciples had waited until Jesus had finished praying and then they asked him to teach them how to do the same. There is no command in the Hebrew Bible to pray, however prayer quickly becomes a part of the relationship between Man and God as we see in Genesis 4:26 that during the days of Enosh 'men began to call on the name of the Lord'. It was common practice in the Second Temple period for disciples to mimic the prayers of their rabbis.

There are two versions of the Lord's Prayer in the New Testament. The prayer in Matthew is slightly longer than the one here in Luke. Some scholars think that the shorter one is closer to the original prayer taught by Jesus. However I think the prayer in Matthew is actually the Hebrew version, as it begins with a classic Hebrew opening to prayer: אָבִינוּ שְׁמַיִם (*Avenu sh'bashamyim*), our Father in heaven. The Luke version is Aramaic as it begins with a simple Aramaic word, *Abba* (Father). Jesus may have taught his disciples prayers in both Hebrew and Aramaic, which is seen here in the differences in Matthew and Luke. Prayer reminds us that the Lord not only speaks to us but he delights that we speak also to him. After teaching the Disciples' Prayer, Jesus then adds some illustrations to teach that God wants our passionate persistence in prayer. We are told to keep on asking, seeking, and knocking. These three verbs are all in the present continuous tense in Greek. Prayer is not a single activity but a continual practice. Prayer in Hebrew is also a reflective verb, that is prayer is less about changing God's mind (as if we could) and more about changing ourselves. Jesus also says that God especially loves to give us his Holy Spirit more than any other gift. I am going to assume we would all prefer it if God hears us when we speak to him in prayer. Conversely, we should afford the same grace to the Lord and pay attention when he speaks to us.

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ACNA Readings

Genesis 18:20-33. This is a very interesting story in which we find Abraham engaging in direct serious negotiations with the Lord. Abraham will not do this when instructed to sacrifice his son Isaac in Genesis 22, but here he will over the impending doom of Sodom. What is the difference? Perhaps it is that the Lord has spoken his word on what he intends to do once he has visited and examined the city. Whereas with Isaac it will simply be a direct command to go and perform. During the dialogue Abraham establishes a principle with God that he will not destroy the righteous with the wicked. The hypothetical number of righteous required to avert destruction is slowly reduced to a mere ten. One wonders what would have happened should Abraham have argued further as there are actually only four righteous people in the city: Lot, his wife, and their two daughters. Importantly, nowhere does Abraham demand that God explain himself or his actions. Abraham takes God at his word that he will do as he says. This demonstrates his faith and character, which we can emulate. The intercession of Abraham is also very much in line with his character of being a blessing to the nations. Here he is being a blessing to Sodom, who are wicked men, by defending them before God.

Psalm 138. The first verse proclaims the theme of the psalm: I give you thanks. There is a reference to the holy sanctuary in the following verse and this has led some commentators to connect the psalm to the daily thanksgiving offering in the temple. While the opening verse is singular and personal, David also declares that even the Gentile kings of the earth will praise God and give thanks in verse 4. The reason David and everyone else praises the Lord is because of his loving kindness and his truth. Having mentioned God's truth, David considers how God communicates that truth to his creation, which is through his spoken word which he magnifies even above his one name. The Hebrew of verse 2 is easy to read but not so easy for commentators to understand. The text literally says that, 'what you have said' (אֲמַרְתָּ) has been exalted above your name. God has such a high estimation of his words that he speaks that he glorifies them above his own name. For us this means we should pay full attention to what God is saying to us as he speaks into every aspect of our lives. He values and esteems his word, and so should we.

About the author. The Rev. Aaron Eime is a deacon at Christ Church Jerusalem and a teacher for CMJ Israel. Aaron studied in the master's program at Hebrew University with a focus on early Jewish and Christian interpretation of the Bible. He also studied psychology and sociology at Queensland University in Australia. Aaron is a dedicated Bible teacher exploring the Hebraic roots of the Christian faith. He reads Aramaic and ancient Greek and is fluent in German and Hebrew. He has taught internationally, including in Europe, North America, Hong Kong, and China. He lives in Jerusalem with his wife and three children.