Some weeks, when I take my first peek at the lectionary selections, it’s pretty clear from the start where I’ll find some common meaning – a discernable thread that weaves its way through each reading – a bit of shared Good News to proclaim. Those are nice weeks… This has not been one of those weeks. Today’s pericope ranges from the Lord’s shocking command to Hosea: “Go, take for yourself a wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom…” to a Psalm begging God to restore Israel from a time of dreadful hardship and suffering… to Jesus Christ teaching his disciples the Lord’s Prayer … +++ So, where do we go from there? +++ These passages are very different in tone, different in setting, different in mood. – Are they all somehow – ultimately – together – giving us something we can keep?? Something we can bounce around in our heads on the way home from church, and maybe even a bit longer than that? +++ Well… let’s start with a definite common denominator and see where that takes us:: each of these passages, despite their mood and outlook, gives us the promise of a God who is involved with us – deeply and intimately involved… a God who is still present and active in our lives … a God who listens. +++ So, there’s a starting point – let’s dig into each of the readings and see how they do that… then see where they take us next.

Hosea wrote during a very difficult time for Israel. After the Unified Kingdom of David and Solomon had broken into two smaller states (the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah), they each continued side-by-side for about two hundred years. Hosea is in the Northern Kingdom, whose capital is Samaria. The great Assyrian Empire has arisen in the west and it poses the biggest threat the Northern Kingdom has ever faced. In fact, soon Assyria will conquer it. – And that’s when the Northern Kingdom of Israel will disappear from history – forever. +++ Hosea sees the danger coming. He also sees that Israel’s strength and resolve are faltering at just the worst time. Why is that happening? It’s because they’ve turned their backs on God.+++ Instead of trusting God as they once did, there are intrigues with foreign powers – even an alliance with Syria against Judah. There is infighting, civil war, and assassinations in Samaria as would-be kings vie for power. And worst of all – Israel has slipped into religious pluralism. Many gods are worshiped, especially Baal – the Canaanite storm god – who is worshiped all over the kingdom. +++ Israel has forgotten the first commandment: “You shall have no other Gods but me.” +++ +++ Now, marriage is a common metaphor for the relationship between God and God’s People – in fact, it comes up again in the New Testament representing Christ and the Church. In this case, God commands Hosea to marry “a wife of whoredom,” a prostitute named Gomer. +++ What’s that all about? +++ Well, Hosea – a righteous prophet – married to a prostitute, becomes a living allegory of God and Israel – the divine, all-powerful, loyal and righteous God – linked firmly and forever – to a disloyal adulterer. And the names of their children spell out what such a marriage will produce: bloodshed, defeat on the battlefield, judgment, and denial. +++ +++ BUT… Even in judgment – even after breaking faith with God – and with terrible times just ahead – the Lord is not walking away from Israel. This marriage between God and God’s People – as shocking as it is – will never be dissolved – their connection will never be broken. – God will not divorce even this disloyal prostitute spouse:: their connection cannot be broken… God is present – God is active in their lives – actively working at reconciliation. And the passage ends with a promise… Eventually – “where it was said to them, ‘You are not my people,’ it shall be said to them, ‘Children of the Living God.’” +++ And so, what starts out as a difficult reading to hear turns out to be the perfect message for this day of baptism. For young Grant – for all of us – as for Israel::… Once sealed in relationship to the Lord – once claimed as God’s own – that bond can never be broken… Not because of anything we’ve done – but because of what God is doing. Not because of who we are – but because of who God is.

Our Psalm comes at a time when Judah (the Southern Kingdom) is feeling abandoned and alone, at the mercy of other dominant nations in the region. The Psalmist cries out, reminding God of the help given to their ancestors over the generations, in times of judgment, hunger, and war. And, in lament, he asks “Will you be angry at us forever?… Will you not revive us again, so that your people may rejoice in you?” +++ After expressing all of that frustration – the psalmist makes a simple, prayerful request: “Show us your steadfast love, O Lord, and grant us your salvation… The Lord will give what is good, and our land will yield its increase.” +++ Again, as in

Hosea, the psalmist calls out to a **God who listens** :: – whatever mistakes you’ve made – whatever darkness you face – however alone you feel. God is engaged with you. Grace, peace, and forgiveness are there for the asking. “Righteousness will go before him, and will make a path for his steps”

And that brings us to our Gospel lesson. As he often does, Jesus is praying. When he finishes, the disciples ask him to teach **them** to pray like that. It’s not just a curiosity – the time of Christ’s **departure** is fast approaching. They need to learn how to do things for themselves that Jesus has been taking care of for them – and that includes communing directly with the Father in Heaven. And so, he teaches them – in this case Luke’s version of the Lord’s Prayer (Matthew’s version is more familiar to us). Jesus tells them to Pray to glorify God. Pray for fulfillment. Pray for forgiveness. Pray to persevere against enemies and temptation. +++ And, with the parable of the man knocking on his friend’s door at midnight, Jesus goes on to tell them to keep at it – don’t give up – make prayer a way of life. Don’t let your desire for instant gratification convince you that God is not listening because the Lord **always** listens when you pray.

I don’t think there could be a more appropriate message for our time – a time when the values we learned in Sunday School can be hard to find in our daily lives. As in Hosea’s Israel, there is infighting among our leaders, intrigues and dangerous alliances with foreign powers – and the church is sought out less and less as a moral compass. We worship **many** gods – not one named Baal – but we worship at the altar of the almighty dollar – and at the alters of power, popularity, selfishness, and greed. +++ This is a time when Christ is given lip-service in our public dialogue but the values for which he lived and died are often dormant. Now, hatred, racism, misogyny, and sexual violence are becoming **more** tolerated in our society – not less. +++ The sins of Israel were turning their backs on God – alienation – a pervading sense of abandonment and fear… +++ In our time, we try to lock God away from our day-to-day lives – **oh sure**, when tragedy strikes we’ll promise to “keep them in our prayers”, but what kind of follow-through do we give it? – When we want to make a new law or restrict someone’s rights, we cherry-pick scripture so we can presume to have God on our side. – We condemn the alleged sins of others, but a personal commitment to living into our faith is no longer part of our public dialogue. +++ Let me tell you – it all applies today just as much as 3,000 years ago. +++ Hosea’s “wife of whoredom” has **nothing** on **our** time – cheating, unfaithful, unrepentant. +++ The Psalmist was speaking for **us:** “Restore us again, O God of our salvation, and put away your indignation towards us. Will you be angry with us forever? … Will you not revive us again, so that your people may rejoice in you?” +++

Is it too late for us? +++ Have we gone too far this time? … **NEVER** … **That’s** the **GOOD NEWS** embedded in today’s difficult, challenging, readings. +++ Our eternal bridegroom will **never** sever ties with us – as much as we may deserve it. Our laments of separation – our confusion and despair – will be replaced by the Lord’s reminder:: no matter what you do – no matter how far you stray – you are “Children of the Living God” – and you always will be. +++ Our connection with our Creator is eternal. +++ +++ Not because of anything we’ve done – but because of **what God is doing**. Not because of who we are – but because of **who God is**. +++ The Lord is present always – listening, always… So, do what Christ **taught** us to do – what Christ is **calling you** to do:: **pray**. +++ “**Ask**… and it will be given you;… **search**… and you will find;… **knock**…, and the door will be opened for you.” For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.”

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.