Love That Advocates – An Invitation to Courage

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost, Proper 12C || July 20, 2025 || 9:30am St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, Hanover, MA || Hosea 1:2-10; Psalm 85; Colossians 2:6-9; Luke 11:1-13 || The Reverend Amy Whitcomb Slemmer, Esq.

We are Mid-summer, when I hope that your pace has slowed a bit. For such a beautiful morning, we are challenged with thorny and difficult readings. Unless you read ahead, it probably shocked your senses to have some of the language used from Hosea. It is rough to have the concept of out of wedlock dating take up the central rhetoric in one of our scripture readings. We can dive into the Hosea passage during bible study this morning if you are interested, For now, the central theme of our Hebrew scripture this morning is that even in the face of unfaithfulness, God can redeem us. God is always faithful and waiting for us.

If you've had a loved one, friend or relative who is facing difficulties – whether it involves dating outside the lines, or a health or financial crisis - perhaps you or someone you love or support has a child in trouble...these circumstances while human and familiar can also be paralyzing.

This week when faced with the headlines and front page stories of beloved children of God being treated worse than shelter animals by beloved children of God – I have to confess, the wind was knocked out of my sails.

It made me wonder – what could I do, how can I help? And I was offered the gift of this morning's readings where Jesus invites us to act – to advocate – to pray!

Luke's gospel contains more references to Jesus praying than any of the other gospels, and this morning the disciples take notice and ask Jesus to teach them to pray. If you too feel like you would like to learn how to pray – this morning is for you!

Jesus jumps in and offers us an abbreviated, efficient form of the Lord's prayer. Jesus teaches that we aren't supposed to pray for our personal needs only.

We don't pray to have our own hunger vanquished- instead this is a community, a corporate request – as in the body – the corpus of Christ – Give US each day our daily bread. What an important, if subtle reminder for us that if you are hungry, but I am fed, we are hungry!

This beautiful, and personal and intimate prayer that Jesus offers is a roadmap for public faith, based in courage. Whether we see or feel that our prayers are answered as we expect; the mere ACT of praying is a demonstration of our courage and trust in God.

And when we pray the Lord's prayer, we are expanding our horizons to pray and be connected to others.

The Lord's prayer, as shared in Luke is deeply intimate, having a heart connecting conversation with the one we call our father or our mother, or our heavenly advocate. This is not a God from which we avert our eyes, this is a beautifully comforting, deeply relational introduction that signals our willingness to speak with God and our understanding that God is always listening.

The next part of the prayer asks for God's kingdom to come. That's about justice **now**. It's a plea for the world to be reordered—to align with God's vision and desire for each of us to be whole, and wholly ourselves, to live as God sees us. God's vision as so frequently described in scripture is a world of equity, mercy, and peace. When we pray this way we affirm our belief that such a world is possible. It's to summon the courage to work for it. And it's to accept the cost.

Because love that advocates is often inconvenient.

Think of the neighbor in Jesus' parable. It's midnight. Everyone's asleep. But someone knocks. Someone's hungry. Someone needs help. And even if friendship won't open the door, *persistence* will.

The Lord's prayer is not the foundation of a polite, orderly faith. This is the kind of prayer that wakes the neighbors. That calls public servants to account. That writes letters and shows up at court hearings. That knocks and knocks and knocks until the bread is shared and everyone is fed.

Love as advocacy isn't only about what *we* do. It's also about *God's indefatigable love for us, even when* we're a mess.

That's what the prophet Hosea is wrestling with in our first reading. It's a troubling passage—Hosea is told to marry a woman who will betray him. It's a metaphor for Israel's unfaithfulness

to God. And yet… the passage ends with "In the place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' it shall be said to them, 'Children of the living God.'"

God won't give up. God keeps showing up. God keeps loving us —even when the covenant has been shattered. That's divine advocacy. Not a love that waits for us to get it right, but a love that says: "You are beloved and you are mine."

That's the love we are called to reflect in our own lives. A love that holds fast through disappointment. That advocates for the poor, the sick, the hungry and the oppressed – God's beloved children who are shunned as "not my people." The jailed and the jailers. These ARE God's people and our siblings in Christ.

Perhaps you don't feel called to advocate or energized by taking our understanding of God's love as Advocacy out for a spin. Perhaps you are afraid about potential consequences. The letter from Paul to the Colossians is worth a re-read because it is full of marvelous reminders and encouragement about what it means to be the people of Christ. Paul reminds the Colossians and each of us that we are rooted in love, strengthened by community and we are forgiven and promised eternal life. Those are GREAT reminders to stand upon whenever fear seeps in and distracts us from God's love.

Paul reminds his listeners and modern folk= He says, "See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit." That is: don't get distracted by fear. Don't buy the lie that you're powerless. Or that God is far away. Or that nothing can change.

Jesus didn't get distracted by the counter-narrative that swirled around him in his day.

Jesus faced down the cross itself—the ultimate act of state-sponsored violence—and said: Love still wins. Forgiveness still flows. Bread is still broken and shared.

That is the legacy that we stand upon. We don't have to be brave all on our own. We just have to be willing and available.

What might that look like this morning at St. Andrew's?

Maybe it looks like praying with your feet—showing up at a rally or a courthouse or accompanying a stranger or loved one to a doctor's appointment. Maybe it looks like praying with your phone—calling someone who's grieving, even when you don't know what to say. Perhaps it looks like praying with your body—feeding someone who's hungry, sharing your guest room, or offering a ride. Maybe it looks like praying with your presence—advocating

for someone who's been silenced or forgotten. Standing with those whose dignity has been denied.

On Wednesday – each of us has the opportunity to be love as advocate when we host the women from Rosie's place. We can practice our summer lessons of love by listening generously, offering our presence vulnerably, willing to be changed as we expand our community and extend our loving hospitality.

Because love that advocates isn't abstract. It's embodied. It risks. It interrupts. It steps in even when we're afraid. Jesus did not teach us the Lord's prayer to be polite Christians. We are here to be *persistent* ones. We are here to say, "Give us bread"—not just for ourselves, but for everyone. We are here to live the kind of love that advocates, even when it costs us something.

Let's keep knocking. Let's keep praying. Let's keep showing up. Because the world is aching. And God is listening. Let us pray

In the name of the God who calls us Beloved, who meets our courage with grace, and who advocates for us even when we can't advocate for ourselves. Amen+