**Sin is bad; Jesus is good; inquire within**

Will Fitzgerald

Kalamazoo Mennonite Fellowship

July 31, 2016

Opening bidding:

“Let those who are wise give heed to these things, and consider the steadfast love of the LORD.” (Psalm 107:43)

It’s been pretty hot at times this summer, and there’s a meme that has popped up on Facebook. It’s a picture of a church sign. It says something like:

TOO HOT TO KEEP

CHANGING SIGN

SIN BAD JESUS GOOD

DETAILS INSIDE



Well, our lectionary passages have a few things to say about this. I’m glad you’re here for some of the details.

All of these passages talk about the good and the bad of what it means to be a human being. All of these take a pessimistic view about the ability of we human beings to be good. But none of them leaves us there, but give us hope that, through the goodness of God, we can be good..

It’s dangerous to take four passages in such a short time, but I promise we’ll be ok.

**Hosea 11:1-11.**

Let’s start with Hosea 11:1-11. Hosea speaks for a God that longingly loves people; God’s chosen ones. Alas, though God has rescued Israel and brought them out of their enslavement; though God nurtured them as a loving mother or father teaching their children to walk; though God led them with gently and tenderly; the people are bent. They are bent on spurning God, turning in another direction.

Isn’t that just like us? God, or even other people, can do such kindness to us, and we respond with anger and distress over this or that. A best friend we’ve had forever drops us because we forgot their birthday, or said something “off.” We get into an argument with a spouse because they forgot to do the dishes today, even through they’ve done the dishes for the past three months. We try to kick God in the pants because we’re unhappy with how God did this or that, even though we remember, in our saner moments, that God has literally died on our behalf.

In Hosea’s poetic passage, God muses how to treat these people. Should they get the punishment they deserve? Should God destroy them? No, God will treat them tenderly:

“How can I give you up? How can I hand you over? My compassion grows warm and tender; I will not execute my fierce anger.”

God is going to roar like a lion ­– but God wants us to know that this is a roar of strength and protection. It might sound very scary, and we will tremble like scared birds, but we can fly like birds to our safe home.

We are bad, says Hosea, but God remains on our side. He will make all things good, and save us.

**Psalm 107:1-9, 43**

The psalm takes up a similar theme to Hosea.

We just get a part of this song. The focus is how we find ourselves in distress: sometimes because of our own bad choices, sometimes because of the bad choices of others, sometimes just because of where we find ourselves. The verse we have: we are like people wandering in a desert trying to find a town, someplace that can sustain life together. We are hungry and thirsty. But God will satisfy our hunger and thirst, and a place to stay.

We have things bad, says the psalmist, but God remains on our side. He will make all things good, and save us.

**Colossians 3:1-11** (read, along with 12-17)

Paul is writing to the people at the church at Colossae. In our lectionary section, he makes a list that followers of Christ are to avoid. Among these are: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, greed, anger, wrath, malice, slander, abusive language, and lying.

Several of these are sexual sins. Some of these have fairly precise meanings: “fornication” is sexual intercourse outside of the marriage union, for example, But the others are vaguer terms, that hint at some of the ways that sex and the sexual instinct can go wrong: sex that leads to shame, giving into the strong desire of sex, and sexually desire gone wrong in general. All of us are sexual beings, and I think all of us can testify both to the glory of this facet of our beings, but also to the ways it can go wrong. It’s not surprising that one of the most powerful aspects of our beings would be one of the most common ways we “sin bad.”

But Paul doesn’t just list sexual sin. There are economic sins. He calls greed “idolatry,” of all things. There are emotional sins: We can be wrongly angry, wrathful. We can be malicious. There are language sins: We can tell lies about people’s character (slander), we can beat them with our words (abusive language), we can lie in general.

There are lots of ways that we can “sin bad.”