

Eighth Sunday After the Epiphany
Cycle B RCL
Revised

Hosea 2:14-20

Hosea was a prophet from the northern state of Israel during the last years of King Jeroboam II (786-746 BCE) and during the troubled years following before the fall of Samaria. Unlike his older contemporary, Amos, the prophet Hosea believed that Israel might still repent of its sins against God and avoid God's threatened punishment. In this oracle the prophet portrays Israel as an adulterous wife and the Lord as a husband who restores her, a figure that Hosea was to enact in his own marriage to Gomer. The play on words in verse 16 (Hebrew verse 18) wherein Israel will no longer call God *ba'ali* but *'ishi*, words with identical meaning in respect to marriage, reminds us that the central problem Hosea dealt with was the Israelites' merger of Yahwistic religion with Baalistic, a merger that allowed them to understand and worship their God Yahweh as Baal.

Psalm 103:1-13, 22

This *hymn* is an "enthronement psalm" that celebrates God's kingship over all things. The psalm joins the refrain of heavenly beings with that of humans to celebrate the quality of justice and mercy with which God exercises this rule. Although it is a *hymn* in structure, many interpreters have pointed to the similarity of this psalm to the *thanksgiving* psalms as well, especially in verses 3-18.

2 Corinthians 3:1-6

Second Corinthians is a collection of letter fragments rather than a single letter. All of these fragments, however, deal with a dispute Paul had with certain members of his church in Corinth over their overly enthusiastic, charismatic beliefs and practices. Evidently, the dispute became so serious that Paul made a brief visit to Corinth to try to improve the situation; but this mission was a failure, ending with an angry letter from Paul to the Corinthians that we find partially preserved in chapters 10-13. Our passage is a fragment of a follow-up letter to the angry letter that some commentators call the *apologia*, the purpose of which was to reconcile Paul to his church by adapting the language of his teachings to some aspects of the theological language of the Corinthians. The angry tone of 10-13 has disappeared. Paul will now calmly reason with his readers in an effort to wean them away from the excesses of their esoteric interpretation of the Christian faith.

Mark 2:13-22

Tax collectors were despised among the residents of Roman Palestine. The practice was for the tax collector to pay the taxes for his district and then demand payment from the populace far in excess of what the tax collector had just paid. The police would help the tax collector if necessary. Following the calling of Levi the tax collector, the passage contains two *controversy dialogues* between Jesus and the "scribes of the Pharisees" in the first instance (verses 15-17), and between Jesus and "the people" in the second (verses 18-22). Contrary to the usual wisdom, Jesus calls sinners, even egregious sinners like tax collectors, to be his students. Those who already keep the law do not need his instruction. In the second instance Jesus claims that his students do not observe a popular fast because of the presence of the "bridegroom." The new age is already here in Jesus.

© Fred L. Horton. All rights reserved