

Message: “Philosophy and Faith”**Our missionary, Mozart Adevu, shares this story of promise.**

Naomi Addae is married with 6 children. She tells an interesting story:

“I was really a ‘nobody’ in the community of Osramanae until I was fortunate to attend a training in nutrition using moringa and soy as was organized by UMCOR-Sustainable Agriculture & Development in 2011. That was the beginning of a life transformation story. I learned how to use moringa and soy in daily diets, besides that we also learned how to make soy kebabs so I took immediate advantage of the knowledge and started a very small business of preparing and selling soy kebabs in the schools and nearby villages and this has brought me enough income to care for my children in school and to meet daily needs at home. Ever since I started adding moringa and soy into our daily family diet and also using the green leaves of moringa as tea, none of my children have fallen ill to visit the hospital. We as a family are always very healthy, I have also generated enough income to invest in beekeeping and have currently constructed (5) beehives, I believe by this time in 2020 my dream which is to live sustainable life will come to reality.”¹

Naomi’s dream is to live a sustainable life. She’s no longer worried about being a nobody, someone who doesn’t fit in. Naomi has hope. She has a dream. She has a life filled with promise.

We have a choice in life. We can embrace the struggles, injustice and evil of the world. That leads to a life where we have no compassion, where killing becomes acceptable and where we are all nobodies. We have no faith or trust in anyone other than ourselves.

Or we can embrace God and God’s promises. That leads to a life where good always comes out of bad, where we’re reunited with those who were in conflict with us and where we’re all God’s somebody. We hold onto the promises of God, following Jesus because no one can stop us when we do.

Which way of life will you choose? It sounds like an easy choice, but it’s not. Our scripture readings show us how difficult it can be. Hosea tells us about God’s promise while Paul shows us it’s fulfilled in Jesus.

¹ Mozart Adevu, April 2019 newsletter, Global Ministries Missionary

The Holy Spirit gave us a difficult passage for today. Let’s reflect on it and see what we can learn to help us to live by faith. That’s the beauty of the Bible. There are parts we can read and easily understand. They comfort, guide and sustain us. Then there are parts we wrestle with and do not easily understand. The writing, culture and genre of the text can be very difficult. Hosea is like that. But these texts also offer guidance, comfort and spiritual food.

How many remember reading the story of Hosea and his wife, Gomer? Not many of us. I’m sure you’ve read it, but it’s awkward and uncomfortable. We don’t really see much of value when we just read through it. In fact, when some of us think of Gomer, the only image that comes to mind is a picture of the TV character Gomer Pyle, played by Jim Nabors.

Gomer is a woman in this case. That’s where the first difficulty comes. Depending on which translation you read, Gomer is identified either as a whore, a prostitute or an adulterous woman. That’s the language of men in a 2,800 year old culture – full of bias. Sadly, that’s where most of our brains shut off. We read or hear the word prostitute and we go to a negative place. We see her as a bad woman, someone not worth knowing, a person of little value. This is the start of a very negative message from God: *“I’ve run out of mercy. There’s no more forgiveness. ... You’ve become nobodies to me and I, God, am a nobody to you”* (Hosea 1:6-9, MSG). That takes us to a place that makes us uncomfortable. It’s a place of judgment and the absence of God.

The language of the book of Hosea also indicates that Gomer already had children. So she and Hosea are in a blended marriage. She may have been divorced or widowed. If she was active sexually, then the community would have frowned on her lifestyle. Hence the label adulterous woman or, as if that wasn’t enough, whore. Sounds like the language and gender bias of today, doesn’t it?

A strong woman, comfortable in her sexuality is one interpretation. A woman who was a victim is another. I don’t know which is true. Regardless, there are some lifestyle choices, attitudes and behaviors that are suspect. Gomer and Hosea reflect the culture of their time.

Yet a surprising thing happens: God tells Hosea to marry Gomer! And they’re blessed to have three children together. I have to say that Hosea seems to go along with it pretty well - so much for that bias.

What’s going on? To help in our reflection, it’s important to note that there are two genres at work here. First, there’s the historical story of Hosea, Gomer and the people in the northern kingdom of Israel. Second, an allegory, or moral story, is being used to give a message. It’s a message from God to the people of Israel.

We all know stories with morals. They teach us lessons. For example, take the story of the princess and the pea. The story isn’t about the test. It’s about the danger of jumping to conclusions. I have to admit: unless the pea was the size and density of a wrecking ball, I probably wouldn’t feel it!

Hosea is a story of living through the ramifications of our decisions and choices with hope. Even when God is displeased with our behavior, God keeps promises. Verses 10-11 give a different picture, “... *down the road the population of Israel is going to explode past counting, like sand on the ocean beaches. In the very place where they were once named Nobody, they will be named God’s Somebody. Everybody in Judah and everybody in Israel will be assembled as one people. They’ll choose a single leader. There’ll be no stopping them...*”

When things are at their darkest, we often feel like God has either abandoned us or, even worse, is powerless. We feel alone. We feel like we can’t rely or depend on ourselves or anyone else. We’re victims: victims of our own desires, addictions and bad choices; victims of the influence and desires of others; or victims of the indiscriminate injustice, oppression and evil in the world. That’s the greatest lie in the world.

Paul teaches we are “*more than conquerors through the one who loved us*” (Romans 8:37). Like Paul, I’m “*absolutely convinced that nothing – living or dead, angelic or demonic, today or tomorrow, high or low, thinkable or unthinkable – absolutely nothing can get between us and God’s love because of the way that Jesus our Savior has embraced us*” (Romans 8:38-39, MSG).

We have a choice to make: are we a victim or an overcomer?

You see, God promises to save us, to make us children. God keeps that promise, even though we may be living through the ramifications of our own bad decisions and questionable lifestyle. A simple, yet crude, illustration is the toilet bowl prayer. Many of us have done it. We had too much to drink and find ourselves with our face in the toilet bowl. What’s the prayer? Yeah, you know it, “O God, help me and I’ll never drink again.” Does it work? No. God isn’t going to take away the consequences of our actions. If you were to get up the next day and pray, “God help me to give up drinking so I can love you and others,” I know the answer would be different. God promises to help us when we’re willing to do as God wills.

That message is embedded in the story of the blended family of Gomer and Hosea. It’s messy. It’s uncomfortable. Yet there’s a kernel, a seed, of hope and promise. They *will* get through the hard times. They *can* change. God has *not* abandoned them.

Here’s a quick example to show how God works. Jezreel is the name of Hosea’s oldest son. It’s also the name of a city and a valley in northern Israel. It was the site of an infamous assassination. Jezreel means “God scatters.” It’s a place where evil happened. Yet Jezreel has another meaning. Jezreel also means “God sows.” On the other side of the valley from the city of Jezreel is another city, one that is still famous today: Nazareth.

When we’re swept up by the events and culture of today in our homes, neighborhoods, church and nation, God gives us hope. Yes, God does judge us for the sins we commit. That’s a harsh reality. God also plants the seed to save us from our sins, offering to forgive us and restore us to God’s family. All we have to do is to turn to God and ask. That’s the power of love.

The seed God planted is Jesus.

Paul was in prison in Rome when he wrote the letter to the church in Colossae. The congregation was struggling. They had lost their way. The non-Jewish members had heard they needed to get circumcised to be part of the congregation. They were also being led away from faith by the teachings of the Gnostics. This is a group that believed that all of

the answers to life and the universe are found in mysterious, secret knowledge, revealed only to a worthy few. Paul reminds the people in that community that the answers they’re looking for aren’t found in knowledge or human traditions, but in Jesus.

Here’s a quick illustration: people can make a big deal out of the practice of using colored candles on an advent wreath at Christmas. Do you know when that tradition started? A marketing company created it in the 1950s. The true intent is to show the coming of the Light of the World, which grows brighter the closer you get to Christmas. That’s how a human tradition that can distract us from the true meaning of the season: the gift of Christ, the ultimate expression of God’s love.

The lesson for us is clear and obvious. Paul says it well, *“My counsel for you is simple and straightforward: Just go ahead with what you’ve been given. You received Christ Jesus; now live him. You’re deeply rooted in him. You’re well constructed upon him. You know your way around the faith. Now do what you’ve been taught. School’s out; quit studying the subject and start living it! And let your living spill over into thanksgiving.*

Watch out for people who try to dazzle you with big words and intellectual double-talk. They want to drag you off into endless arguments that never amount to anything. They spread their ideas through the empty traditions of human beings and the empty superstitions of spirit beings. But that’s not the way of Christ. Everything of God gets expressed in him, so you can see and hear him clearly. You don’t need a telescope, a microscope, or a horoscope to realize the fullness of Christ, and the emptiness of the universe without him. When you come to him, that fullness comes together for you, too. His power extends over everything” (vv6-10, MSG).

You don’t need more information. Better philosophical arguments aren’t the answer. Being made whole and complete in Jesus isn’t something to figure out or achieve. It’s not about circumcision or laws or a Book of Discipline. There’s no secret ritual or initiation, though baptism has the power to remind us that we turned away from an old life and are resurrected in Christ.

If you’ve accepted Jesus, you’re in! You’re part of God’s family, no matter what may happen in life or what changes you’re going through.

I hope you fully and wholly embrace God’s promise, God’s love.

If you haven’t asked for forgiveness in a while, I invite you to do that. If you aren’t passing God’s blessing on to others, I encourage you start. If you see yourself as a victim, embrace the power of God’s love to overcome whatever you’re facing by grace.

If you don’t know Jesus and want to, I invite you to pray with me now...

Lord, I believe in you. I confess that I have done wrong. Please forgive me. I need your love and want to love you in return. Show me your grace and mercy. I ask this in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Hosea 1:2-11 (The Message)

The first time GOD spoke to Hosea he said:

“Find a whore and marry her.

Make this whore the mother of your children.

And here’s why: This whole country

has become a whorehouse, unfaithful to me, GOD.”

Hosea did it. He picked Gomer daughter of Diblaim. She got pregnant and gave him a son.

Then GOD told him:

“Name him Jezreel. It won’t be long now before

I’ll make the people of Israel pay for the massacre at Jezreel.

I’m calling it quits on the kingdom of Israel.

Payday is coming! I’m going to chop Israel’s bows and arrows into kindling in the valley of Jezreel.”

Gomer got pregnant again. This time she had a daughter. GOD told Hosea:

“Name this one No-Mercy. I’m fed up with Israel.

I’ve run out of mercy. There’s no more forgiveness.

Judah’s another story. I’ll continue having mercy on them.

I’ll save them. It will be their GOD who saves them,

Not their armaments and armies,

not their horsepower and manpower.”

After Gomer had weaned No-Mercy, she got pregnant yet again and had a son. GOD said:

“Name him Nobody. You’ve become nobodies to me, and I, GOD, am a nobody to you.

“But down the road the population of Israel is going to explode past counting, like sand on the ocean beaches. In the very place where they were once named Nobody, they will be named God’s Somebody.

Everybody in Judah and everybody in Israel will be assembled as one people. They’ll choose a single leader. There’ll be no stopping them—a great day in Jezreel!”

Colossians 2:6-15 (The Message)

My counsel for you is simple and straightforward: Just go ahead with what you've been given. You received Christ Jesus, the Master; now *live* him. You're deeply rooted in him. You're well constructed upon him. You know your way around the faith. Now do what you've been taught. School's out; quit studying the subject and start *living* it! And let your living spill over into thanksgiving.

Watch out for people who try to dazzle you with big words and intellectual double-talk. They want to drag you off into endless arguments that never amount to anything. They spread their ideas through the empty traditions of human beings and the empty superstitions of spirit beings. But that's not the way of Christ. Everything of God gets expressed in him, so you can see and hear him clearly. You don't need a telescope, a microscope, or a horoscope to realize the fullness of Christ, and the emptiness of the universe without him. When you come to him, that fullness comes together for you, too. His power extends over everything.

Entering into this fullness is not something you figure out or achieve. It's not a matter of being circumcised or keeping a long list of laws. No, you're already *in*—insiders—not through some secretive initiation rite but rather through what Christ has already gone through for you, destroying the power of sin. If it's an initiation ritual you're after, you've already been through it by submitting to baptism. Going under the water was a burial of your old life; coming up out of it was a resurrection, God raising you from the dead as he did Christ. When you were stuck in your old sin-dead life, you were incapable of responding to God. God brought you alive—right along with Christ! Think of it! All sins forgiven, the slate wiped clean, that old arrest warrant canceled and nailed to Christ's cross. He stripped all the spiritual tyrants in the universe of their sham authority at the Cross and marched them naked through the streets.