

HUM ... DID I HEAR THAT RIGHT?
"Forget the Easy Button"
Hosea 1.2-10

July 24, 2022 Year C: Sunday of Pentecost for July 24th

Butte Aldersgate United Methodist Church

As a way for you to get to know me, I want to share about the names in my family. My name is Seth Landon Leypoldt. My father named me Seth because he liked the biblical name; however, according to my mom, about every two weeks my dad would change his mind. So, if I was born two weeks before or two weeks later, I probably would have had a different name. My middle name is Landon and that is my mother's maiden name.

My wife is Sarah Jo Bernhardt. I don't like to say that she "kept" her name. She just didn't change the name chosen for her at birth. The interesting thing about Sarah's name is the fact that Sarah Bernhardt has been to Butte before. The famed silent screen actor was here in Butte in 1891 and performed at the 1,100-seat opera house on Broadway Street (where the Leggatt Apartments now stand). When my wife arrives here in a couple months, we plan to take a picture of the return of the Divine Sarah Bernhardt in front of the Leggatt.

Each of my daughters are named after literature. Emma from the Jane Austen novel; Cora is a character in *The Last of the Mohicans*; and Olivia is found in *The Color Purple*.

Now I share this with you because each one of us has a story behind our names. I still remember a sermon given by a pastor named Aaron Black. When I worked as an intern in the youth group at that church, I knew his son, Aaron, Jr. Well, one Sunday, Aaron, Sr. told the story of how his son got his name. Aaron, Sr. was out of town, when his wife went into labor unexpectedly. Things went very quickly and the father never made it to the hospital for the birth. When the nurse asked, Janet, the mom, what they were going to name the baby, she just said exhaustively, "name him after his father." That's how he became Aaron Black, Jr.

Names ... names play a significant role in our lives and especially in our passage. Let's listen.

2 When the Lord first spoke through Hosea, the Lord said to Hosea, "Go, take for yourself a wife of prostitution and have children of prostitution, for the land commits great prostitution by forsaking the Lord." 3 So he went and took Gomer daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son.

4 And the Lord said to him, "Name him Jezreel,[a] for in a little while I will punish the house of Jehu for the blood of Jezreel, and I will put an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel. 5 On that day I will break the bow of Israel in the Valley of Jezreel."

6 She conceived again and bore a daughter. Then the Lord said to him, "Name her Lo-ruhamah,[b] for I will no longer have pity on the house of Israel or forgive them. 7 But I will have pity on the house of Judah, and I will save them by the Lord their God; I will not save them by bow or by sword or by war or by horses or by horsemen."

8 When she had weaned Lo-ruhamah, she conceived and bore a son. 9 Then the

Lord said, "Name him Lo-ammi,[c] for you are not my people, and I am not your God." [d]

10 [e] Yet the number of the people of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea, which can be neither measured nor numbered, and 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." (Hosea 1.2-10)

At this point I'm tempted to end the sermon right now and just say, "you come up with your own translation." I mean, how do you preach on this? Hosea: The Father Who Does Not Know Best; Hosea – How not to be Father of the Year; or How to ruin your child's self-image by starting with their name. The list goes on. This is uncomfortable stuff. It makes us squirm a bit. I know it would be easier to simply gloss over the passage, make excuses for Hosea, say something about how that was then but this is now; stuff like that; but we can't. Hosea was a prophet revered throughout the history of Israel.

So, let's look at our series this summer. Say it with me ... Um, did I hear that right?

First, he marries a woman of whoredom. Let's step back for a bit. We might have our mistranslation. One translator, who I prefer, says that Gomer was the wife of promiscuity. Not a prostitute as this text is often translated. She is having trouble remaining faithful to her spouse. This is why God says to Hosea, marry someone of this character. Israel is like a wife of promiscuity. Israel is lacking in faithfulness.

Say, it with me ... Um, did I hear that right?

OK, the text gets a little better, but we still squirm until we realize that we have all been unfaithful to God at times. We've had those times where we'd rather sleep in instead of coming to church; or we look at our wealth as something that is mine instead of realizing that everything comes from God. And each one of us has walked past the needy. We've talked about another behind their back. We have made judgements against God's people instead of realizing that everyone is of sacred worth. We are sinners. What is that phrase again: the church is a hospital for sinners, not a museum for saints. You go to the doctor when you are ill, when you are sick, maybe for some preventative medicine. You do sit in the hospital because you are healthy. Likewise, the church is supposed to make us uncomfortable.

Say it again ... Um, did I hear that right?

Sam and Edith were 85 years old and had been married for sixty years. Though they were far from rich, they managed to get by because they watched their pennies.

Though not young, they were both in very good health, largely due to the wife's insistence on healthy foods and exercise for the last decade. One day, their good health didn't help when they went on a rare vacation and their plane crashed, sending them off to Heaven. They reached the pearly gates, and there an escort was waiting to show them inside. He took them to a beautiful mansion, furnished in gold and fine silks, with a fully stocked kitchen and a waterfall in the master bath and their favorite clothes hanging in the closet. They gasped in astonishment when he said, "Welcome to Heaven. This will be your home now."

Sam asked how much all this was going to cost. "Why, nothing," their companion replied, "remember, this is your reward in Heaven."

Sam looked out the window and right there he saw a championship golf course, finer and more beautiful than any ever built on Earth. "What are the greens fees?"

grumbled the old man. "This is heaven," the companion replied. "You can play for free, every day."

Next, they went to the clubhouse and saw the lavish buffet lunch, with every imaginable cuisine laid out before them, from seafood to steaks to exotic desserts, free flowing beverages. "Don't even ask," said their companion to Sam. "This is Heaven; it is all free for you to enjoy."

The old man looked around and glanced nervously at Edith. "Well, where are the low fat and low-cholesterol foods, and the decaffeinated tea?" he asked. "That's the best part," the companion replied. "You can eat and drink as much as you like of whatever you like, and you will never get fat or sick. This is Heaven!"

Sam pushed, "No gym to work out at?"

"Not unless you want to," was the answer.

"No testing my sugar or blood pressure or ..."

"Never again. All you do here is enjoy yourself."

Sam glared at Edith and said, "You and your crappy bran muffins. We could have been here 15 years ago!!"¹

We laugh, we joke but the seriousness of this passage is still before us. Let's look at the crux of our series this summer – Um ... did I hear that right? Passages that are open to misunderstandings and misinterpretations. The first week that I was here I shared with those who attended what is now known as the Lambs of God Moment that no one wants to be called by another name. Names are important to us and that is why I am trying my best to learn your names and I realize I can get away with it now; but five years from now, you won't be so forgiving.

So, let's examine those names and see if what we have is just a misunderstanding. The first born, Jezreel. He is named after a failed battle. It would be like calling your son "The Bay of Pigs" just as a reminder to the leader of the country of what a disastrous failure his military action was.

Next, Lo-ruhamah; she is called "no pity." This is a warning. You will lose and God will offer no forgiveness. And finally, the champion out of this great list of child names, Lo-ammi; total abandonment. God says to Israel; you are not my people anymore.

When I mentioned this text to one of the helpers this week at Vacation Bible School the response was classic: what was he thinking? What is going on here? He marries a prostitute, names his children in horrible ways. Hosea, speaking on behalf of God, has our attention.

A man walks into a bar and says, "Bartender, give me two shots. One for me and one for my best buddy."

Bartender says, "You want them both now or do you want me to wait until your buddy arrives to pour his?"

The guy says, "Oh, I want them both now. I've got my best buddy in my pocket here." He then pulls a little three-inch man out of his pocket.

The bartender asks, "You mean to say, he can drink that much?"

"Oh, sure. He can drink it all and then some," the man retorted.

¹ Dave Rasmussen. "We could have been to Heaven 15 years ago." *Seth's Compiled List of Jokes & Illustrations, Part VI.*, 14-15.

So, the bartender pours the two shots and sure enough, the little guy drinks it all up.

“That’s amazing!” says the bartender. “What else can he do? Can he walk?”

The man flicks a quarter down to the end of the bar and say, “He, Rodney, go fetch that quarter.” The little guy runs down to the end of the bar, picks up the quarter and runs back down and gives it to the man.

The bartender is in total shock. “That’s amazing!” he says. “What else can he do? Does he talk?”

The man looks up at the bartender with a look of surprise in his eye and says, “Talk? Sure he talks. Hey, Rodney, tell him about that time we were down in Africa, on safari, hunting and you called that native Witch doctor a jerk!”²

Um ... did I hear that right? Hosea has our attention. He is not all talk. There is action behind his words. Is there a warning here for us? You better believe it. Are we all talk and no action? Is it easier to stand in public and say we are against injustice but back away when confronted with it?

Several years ago, when I was serving in what used to be called the Nebraska Annual Conference, our Bishop was named Rhymes Moncure. In fact, he is the Bishop who ordained me. And Bishop Moncure was African American. Not that made him any different of a Bishop, but his ancestors did come from Africa. I remember Cora and I were attending a welcome celebration for this Bishop and we were standing in the reception line getting some peanuts when an elderly woman behind me looks in the peanut bowl and says: “How come they don’t have any N----- Toes?”

Now I am not going to use the word – but you know what she said – at the celebration for our African American bishop. And you know what I did? You know what I said to this elderly woman? You know I how responded? I said nothing! Maybe I was too much in shock. Maybe I was afraid to say something. And folks I’m not being “P-C” here. There is no Political Correctness when it comes to the “N” word to African Americans. It is highly offensive.

OK, I think it is time to bring out the EASY BUTTON. I wish I had this some 20 years ago, standing in that line, hearing something like that ... and push the button ... and hear that woman say instantly, “oh I shouldn’t have said that; that was highly offensive; I will go home now and re-think my entire philosophy on race.
<Push the Easy button>

Wouldn’t it be great to have this in life? In the workplace? Raising kids? Dealing with customers? Having an uncomfortable conversation? Maybe with an ex? Using it in the church.

A couple of years ago – our denomination - apologized for the Sand Creek Massacre. In 1864, a force of 700 men, led by John Chivington, attacked a group of unarmed Native Americans near Sand Creek in Colorado. Long-story-short ... it was a bloody massacre. History books are only recently sharing the story of a time when these men did wrong and only attacked because the population because they were “different.” So why is The United Methodist Church apologizing? Chivington was a Methodist preacher. Sure, he was acting on behalf of his military uniform but every Sunday he stood in the pulpit, and he talked about God’s love. That year, the United Methodist

² “Calls witchdoctor a jerk.” *Ibid.*, Part III. 30.

Church officially apologized and took some beautiful positive steps. Those were wonderful words.

The church pushed the EASY BUTTON, but I wish it was that easy. Just a few months after that declaration, the South Central Jurisdiction of the United Methodist Church gathered to elect three Bishops. In fact, this was the last time the church did this due to COVID. Well, the Jurisdiction met and the representatives from the area assembled and quite quickly elected Bishop Ruben Saenz, who, since my membership is still in the Great Plains Annual Conference until I transfer, is the Bishop for Kansas and Nebraska. Now remember I said that the Jurisdiction had to elect three bishops, so two more to go. Second in the vote getting behind Ruben Saenz, was Mark David Wilson. If elected, he would be the first Native American to be a Bishop in The United Methodist Church. Historic! And despite his heritage, Wilson is more than qualified to serve in this post. Long-story-short. He does not get elected. The second went to a guy from Texas and the third slot to a guy from Missouri. Every vote, Mark David Wilson came in second.

So, I called up a good friend of mine who was there and asked him about his week and why Wilson wasn't elected? Well, he told me what he heard from the other delegates, who said to him, "well, we already elected a Hispanic."

Um ... did I hear that right? We have a quota system and then my friend was told "where do we put him?" You know something like that was said to the first woman and the first African American and the first Lesbian bishop who were elected. Where do we put them?

I am the first to admit the church is not perfect. It was one of the reasons I decided to take a leave of absence and work in the secular world. But in the world of banking and finance, what did I see? The same. I thought, I literally thought, the secular world would be better. And when God began tugging at my heart to come back and serve as a pastor, I shared this struggle with our then current Bishop. I still remember what he said to me, "yes, it is no different, but the church should do better."

You see, when I left the active ministry back in 2012, I was looking for that EASY BUTTON and the Bishop reminded me – the church should do better, but the world doesn't operate that way. In fact, Hosea reminds us to forget the Easy Button. He names his children as a warning. He marries a prostitute to get people's attention. But there is a nugget left in this passage. Listen to verse 10 again: "Yet the number of the people of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea, which can be neither measured nor numbered; and in the place where it was said to them, 'You are not people,' it shall be said to them, 'Children of the living God.'"

Hosea gave the people a terrible warning – and I might add – sacrificed his own family but in the end, he did not leave; he did not walk out on God's people; he stayed where he was needed and spoke these words of hope. Hosea says, "forget the easy button" because there are going to be tough times, but God says, hope will return. We may not have an easy button in life, but God will welcome us home again. So, even though we don't have an easy button, we still have to roll up our sleeves and make it work.

In 1916, Georgia Tech played a football game against Cumberland University, a tiny law school in Alabama. The Tech team was a mighty football powerhouse and

rolled over Cumberland by a score of 222 to 0. Needless to say, Tech also pretty well beat the Cumberland players to a pulp.

Toward the end of the game, Cumberland quarterback Ed Edwards fumbled a snap from center. As the Tech linemen charged into his backfield, Edwards yelled to his backs, "Pick it up! Pick it up!"

Edwards' fullback, seeing the monsters rush in who had battered him all day, yelled back, "pick it up yourself -- you dropped it."³

The church is the greatest thing ever created. I have seen it bring people together in times of disaster, times of need, moments of grief, and certainly times of joy. I have witnessed the church come together to raise money for incredible mission, to helping support families during a pandemic, to stepping up when there was no pastor around. We have dropped the ball in the past. It is our turn to pick it up and make it better. We are the church – together. Amen.

³ Dan Safarik. "Pick it up yourself." *Ibid.*, Part V. 8.