

BIBLE REFLECTION

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The Call to Mission 2 Warts and All

Scripture

Hosea 1

Jonah

Jeremiah 1:4–8

Judges 4:4–10

Hymn Suggestions

“Just as I Am, Without One Plea”
(*The Presbyterian Hymnal*, #370)

“We Give Thee but Thine Own”
(*The Presbyterian Hymnal*, #428)

“Canto de Esperanza/Song of Hope”
(*The Presbyterian Hymnal*, #432)

In a Nutshell

Hosea was able to understand God’s relationship to the people through personal suffering in his relationship with his family. Roberto Diaz, in the midst of personal and communal tragedy, found renewed strength and a new call to mission. Jeremiah thought he was too young to work for God, but God can use us as we are, with whatever limitations we may have.

Hosea

Read Hosea, chapter 1.

Hosea was married. He believed that God had led him to the woman who became his wife and that it was God’s will for them to marry. Nevertheless, the relationship was not a happy one, and the marriage broke up. Chapter 1 of Hosea seems to contain the reflections of the prophet as he looked back on his experience after his wife left him.

He thought about the birth of his children. When the oldest was born, there was no question of infidelity in his relationship with his wife, but there was a lot of friction. He gave his son a symbolic name, *Jezeel*, because it reminded him of a time in the relationship of the people of Israel with God when there was a lot of friction, when people were behaving in ways that were not appropriate for the people

of God. The valley of Jezreel was the sight of a bloodbath that accompanied a revolutionary coup ending the dynasty of Omri, king of Israel (885–874 B.C.).

When the second child came, a daughter, Hosea apparently had a hard time summoning up fatherly affection for her because he doubted he was the father, even though his wife passed the baby off as his child. The name he gave her was Loruhamah, meaning “not pitied.” Again, it was a symbolic name describing the people’s relationship to God and to each other. After that bloody coup at Jezreel, the people of Israel had acted in the name of the Lord, and the temples had been full, just as though the people were God’s faithful ones, but the country was not run according to God’s will. There was injustice and corruption on every side. In other words, there was no pity.

And then came the last child. Hosea knew that biologically it could not be his child. As Hosea looked at what was happening in the life of the people of Israel, he saw little pretense of the nation seeking the Lord’s will. Kings were crowned and tossed aside. New kings came up and nobody asked what God’s will might be (see 2 Kings 15:8–31). Hosea named the third child, a boy, *Lo-ammi*, which meant “not my people.”

For Discussion:

- **When Hosea looked at the relationship between God and Israel in light of his relationship with his wife, what did he see?**
- **What was Hosea’s mission?**
- **What similarities do you see between Hosea and Amos? What similarities do you see between their messages? What differences do you see?**

In short, Hosea saw the story of his marriage as a vivid representation of what had been happening in the relationship between God and God’s people. There was a time when the people had a sort of honeymoon with the Lord, but then the friction started. They didn’t want to love their neighbors or to live in justice and harmony. They began doing unjust things in the name of the Lord, and finally, they forgot the name of the Lord. Hosea, out of the tragedy and heartbreak of his own personal experience, rose up to become one of the great prophets in the history of Israel.

It is interesting that it was personal tragedy that led to Hosea's call to mission. I have seen this happen time and time again in my work with the brave men and women of the Colombian Presbyterian Church: how tragedy has become an instrument for the greater outpouring of God's power.

For Discussion:

- **Read Jon. 1:1–2. What was Jonah's mission?**
- **Read Jonah, chapters 3 and 4. How did God use Jonah's experience to help Jonah gain some understanding of God's mission?**
- **Read Hos. 1:5–11 and Jon. 1:2 and 3:10. What do you think God wants us to understand?**

The Struggle in Colombia

One of the things we struggle with in Colombia today is a culture of violence. Violence is everywhere. For the most part this violence is not drug related. I know that is what you hear on the news in the United States, but let's think about it for a minute.

Drug processing is a secret thing. Even the drug barons who operate out of Colombia don't let the general public know what they are doing. Their work is done in jungle hideouts where nobody can see them. Most Colombians have nothing to do with drugs. They hate the drug traffic. They have shed their blood to fight it. The drug problem is in the United States, where demand produces the international drug traffic. I am not saying that drugs aren't a problem in Colombia. I am saying this is not the most important problem that Colombians are facing today. Rather, it is the violence that has to do with the very structures of Colombian society.

In Colombia, as in most Latin American countries, about 10 percent of the population controls 90 percent of the land and the wealth. Some years back guerrilla groups began a new initiative in Colombia. (The Spanish word *guerrilla* means "little war.") They didn't declare an open war. Their technique is to harass the army and the police as a means of protest because they have given up on the normal political processes. With the traditional political processes dominated by that upper 10 percent of the population, the guerrilla groups do not expect to see change through the political system.

The army is responding to the challenge of the different guerrilla groups. In addition, a number of paramilitary groups that initially worked behind the scenes have come out into the open. These groups represent the interests of

the landowners, and then often do the dirty work the army doesn't want to get caught doing. So a terrible situation exists today. A guerrilla group says to the farmers, "Don't have anything to do with the army." But the paramilitaries say, "Don't have anything to do with the guerrillas." The poor farmers are caught in the middle. And one or the other of these groups will come into a community and say, "You have twenty-four hours to get out of here. We will kill anyone who stays after that time." Sometimes they are not so blunt. They just close off the roads to a village so that no food, medicine, or other supplies can be brought in. The people who leave cannot return. Finally only a handful of people remain, and they, too, decide to go because they can't survive any more. Massacres are so common that they hardly make headlines in the newspapers. There are many cases of indiscriminate shootings in which twenty-five or more people are killed.

This violence has become a way of life. There are nearly two million displaced persons in Colombia right now, people who have been forced to flee their homes because of the violence. And the number is growing. One town filled its indoor sports arena with one thousand cots for displaced persons, people who had nowhere else to go. Across the country town squares are full of displaced persons who have come in from the country and can't get jobs. They are skilled at farming, but there is not much demand for farmers in the city.

Wave after wave of displaced persons is leaving home. We in the Presbyterian Church of Colombia are grateful for the office of Presbyterian Disaster Assistance in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), which has given us resources to respond to this crisis. We are grateful for the many faithful people who stand behind us in this situation.

For Discussion:

- **How is the situation in Colombia similar to the situation Hosea saw?**
- **How is the United States similar to Hosea's Israel?**

If you or I had to go through what these displaced persons have, we would say, "Where was God when I needed help? How could God let this happen to me? Why me?" But the Colombians say, "I couldn't have made it if it had not been for God, who gave me strength." When they get to safety, one of the first things they do is reorganize their church and hold a worship service. Some towns have Presbyterian churches that were founded by groups of displaced persons.

Roberto Díaz

Roberto Díaz was the pastor in the remote village of Las Piedras (names have been changed). The highway that leads to the village is so primitive it practically disappears when it rains. Traveling to Las Piedras by Jeep we had to cross a stream bed on a rough log bridge. Mud had been packed between the logs to make a smooth surface, but the water level had risen and eaten away the packing from the bottom, so there was just a thin layer on top. We couldn't see the danger, so we drove the Jeep onto the bridge. Soon the right rear wheel got caught between two of the logs, and the car slipped and dangled over the side of the bridge with nothing but the rushing river beneath. We got out safely and applied ourselves to creative engineering feats that eventually got the Jeep across the bridge. We arrived at our destination in a pouring rain.

With that introduction to Las Piedras, you might be surprised to learn that Roberto served in the largest Presbyterian church in the presbytery. It was bigger than the Catholic church, and that is really saying something because Colombia is still a predominantly Catholic country. (In fact, the Roman Catholic church is the official church established in the constitution, Colombia being one of the few countries that still has a treaty with the Vatican.)

The congregation had set up a model farm in order to help farmers find new ways to diversify their crops. They organized a community action program to deal with the problems of the roads and so forth. But one day something happened. Nobody is sure exactly why it happened.

For some reason, paramilitary troops apparently decided that Las Piedras sympathized with and protected the guerrilla fighters. So the paramilitary burst into the village one Wednesday afternoon. The men were returning from the fields where they had been working all day. The paramilitary, with their rifles loaded and pointed, rounded up all the men in the central square of the town and prepared to shoot them. Perhaps forty or fifty men were gathered there. The women and children huddled nearby.

One of the paramilitaries tried to lead the children into the Catholic church so they wouldn't see the massacre. Another paramilitary man knew our pastor, Roberto Díaz. He sidled up to Roberto amid the confusion in the square and said, "Pastor, don't let them kill you. Make a run for it!"

That was just what Roberto needed to hear. Everybody had been paralyzed with fear up to that point, but Roberto ran, and when he did the others ran, too. The paramilitaries

shot indiscriminately. The townspeople ran as fast as they could. The children being herded off to the Catholic church started running, too. Two of them came up and grabbed Roberto's hands. He still doesn't know who they were, just kids from the village. But the presence of those children saved him, for he heard the paramilitary leader give the order to stop shooting so that they wouldn't kill any of the children.

The villagers kept running. Some ten or twelve fell, but Roberto testifies that he was saved by a miracle from God. He made it to the forest and hid there, sleeping outside with nothing to eat for two full days. The villagers were afraid to go home. Everybody was hiding. Separated families didn't know the whereabouts or the fate of family members. While they were in the woods, the people saw flames shooting up from the village. The paramilitary troops, frustrated because the massacre fell far short of the numbers they had planned, had set a fire and burned down the entire town. The villagers lost everything.

Some three thousand people came down from the mountains seeking security. Many of them now live in a little town at the foot of the mountains. The Colombian Presbyterian Church responded to their basic needs with funds made available through Presbyterian Disaster Assistance. But they are still suffering. They haven't enough food to eat or clothing to wear, they can't find work, and there are no schools for their children. In addition, many of them have malaria because they are from the mountains and are not used to the tropical climate they now live in.

The church in their new town was able to get off the ground after the refugees from Las Piedras arrived. It was like an injection of vitamins when all of the believers from the village came down into the valley. Today this church is strong and growing because of the faith of these believers. But Pastor Roberto is not there. He couldn't stay in the area because the paramilitaries would have targeted him as the leader who thwarted their plans. He is now pastoring a church in a large city.

If you go on a Caribbean cruise and the ship makes port in Cartagena, you will want to visit the Presbyterian church. Actually, there are two. There is the older, established church, and there is an entire congregation of displaced persons from the different zones of violence in Colombia. In the midst of personal tragedy I have seen how the leaders of the Colombian church have risen up, taken hold, and gathered more force, just as Hosea did.

For Discussion:

- **How do you think Roberto Díaz perceives his call?**
- **What is his mission?**

Jeremiah

Read Jer. 1:4–8.

In this passage God calls Jeremiah, and Jeremiah protests that he isn't capable of doing the job. Miguel could have said, "I can't do this; I only have one leg." Roberto Díaz could have said, "I can't do this. I have just been through a traumatic experience, and I lost everything." But the fact is that the leaders of the church in Colombia forged ahead in spite of what might seem insurmountable obstacles to you and me.

Jeremiah thought he couldn't respond to God's call because he was too young and inexperienced. Not many people in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) will likely use that as an excuse not to respond to God's call. However, you may be thinking, "I can't get involved in mission because . . . I have arthritis; because . . . I still have children at home that need me; because . . ." There's always an excuse.

For Discussion:

- **Read Jer. 1:6; Exod. 3:11; 4:1, 10, 13; Jon. 3:10—4:2; and Matt. 8:18–22. Why do people tend to make excuses when they first hear God's call?**
- **How does a sense of call to mission and ministry help a person transcend, or move beyond, his or her personal situation and limitations?**

God said to Jeremiah: "I made you just the way you are, at just the age you are, because I wanted *you* for what I am doing." Maybe God is saying to you at this moment, "I made you just the way you are because I want you." Maybe you are not going to go out and found a church in some remote mountain or jungle village. But perhaps you could get your congregation involved with the work of the Amoses, Hoseas, Jeremiahs, and Deborahs of this world. That is a response to the call to mission as well.

For Discussion:

- **Read Judg. 4:4–10.**
- **What roles did Deborah play in her society?**
- **What do you think her mission was? What limitations do you think she could have used as excuses to avoid accepting God's call?**
- **How do you see Deborah's mission as different from Amos's mission? What similarities do you see?**

In every one of us there is an Amos who needs to be concerned about the needs of the world, a Hosea who needs to rise above personal problems to respond to the call to mission, a Deborah for people to consult with, and a Jeremiah who needs to recognize that not even physical limitations are an obstacle for God. Most of us would say, "I am not trained to do mission work." Many of us would say, "I have had to deal with terrible problems in my own life." Some of us would say, "It is my bum knee, it is my bad back, it is my age . . ." Everyone has something to overcome, but God is calling everyone in the body of Christ to the work of mission.

That is why the Colombian Presbyterian Church is growing. That is why the church is growing around the world: every believer is doing mission. Every believer is an evangelist. Every believer recognizes that the call to salvation is also God's call to mission. May we hear that **call?**, you Amoses, you Hoseas, you Jeremiahs who are reading this now. May we hear God's call and recognize how God is at work among the Amoses, the Hoseas, the Jeremiahs, among the Presbyterians of this world, among all the peoples of this world. God bless you as you reach out to others in the name of Jesus Christ.

For Discussion:

- **In the Reformed tradition we believe that one's call is threefold: God calls one to service; the person accepts; and the church affirms the call. Give examples of calls and how the faith community might validate those calls. Why, in our tradition, is validation a component of call?**
- **What is God's call to you? Or to what new thing is God calling you—individually or as a group? Describe the three parts of this call (God's call, how you perceive and accept the call, how the call is affirmed by the faith community through your church session, the presbytery, the synod, or the General Assembly).**