

Day 10: Joel 1

“What the locust swarm has left, the great locusts have eaten; what the great locusts have left, the young locusts have eaten; what the young locusts have left, other locusts have eaten. Joel 1:4 (NIV)

My Mom described how they had “the most beautiful field of flax”, and were about a week from harvest. South Dakota had reported grasshopper swarms advancing north, but thought they would be able to harvest before they arrived.

The following day, “billions” of two-striped, 2-3 inch grasshoppers descended, having traveled from SD to Pembina in less than 24 hours. She described the ground as “seeming to roll and be alive” as you walked. The grasshoppers would attach themselves to your hair and clothing and immediately start eating. They ate the screen out of the screen door, the wooden fence posts, the clothing off the clothes line, even the shirt off her dad’s back. Their beautiful field of flax was eaten right to the ground, leaving no evidence that a field had ever existed. What a picture of destruction, ruin, and hopelessness.

There have been times, when that bleak picture was reflected in my life - when things you took for granted were whittled away or suddenly disappeared. Hopelessness engulfed me and at times I found myself curled up in the fetal position, crying uncontrollably, and questioning WHY.

Joel tells us to, “gird ourselves, lament, fast, call a solemn assembly, gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land into the house of the Lord your God, and cry unto the Lord.”

When the light of God’s grace is dimmed by depression, hopelessness, and anguish, your salvation is in prayer and fasting. He alone will banish despair and restore the vision to trust His plan for you. I’m living proof!

Patty VerDouw



HOSEA & JOEL

Day 6: Hosea 8-9

The days of punishment have come; the days of judgement have arrived; Israel cries, “The prophet is a fool, the spiritual man is mad!” Because of your great wickedness, your rejection of me is great. Hosea 9:7 (CEB)

Hosea is perhaps not a popular choice for a leisurely afternoon of reading on the porch; however, the striking discomfort the text elicits is precisely its value. In terms of genre, this text is part of one of Hosea’s speeches to the people of the Northern Kingdom, so—as you read—try imagining yourself in the audience listening to a wild speaker making accusations against you and whichever group you might be with.

Hosea is a prophet, someone who’s been paying attention to the changes in the community and knows enough of God’s story to see what will result. We may think of a prophet as some sort of formal and hallowed leader given her or his special task from God, but the verse I have chosen suggests something else for Hosea. He is derided as hysterical, he quotes the people calling him “a fool” and “mad,” perhaps they believe he is making mountains out of molehills. Confronted like that with the ways I turn from God, I imagine I would have some snide comments for later.

Reading the Minor Prophets casually can be like overhearing someone else’s family argument, uncomfortable but also irrelevant. Fortunately, if we read with intention and pray for the Spirit’s guidance, we can see how Hosea’s words are true for all nations and ages and even begin to hear something of the prophetic in the voices around us.

Tanner Carlson

Day 8: Hosea 10-11

“I led them with cords of human kindness, with ties of love. To them I was like one who lifts a little child to the cheek, and I bent down to feed them.” Hosea 11, 4 NIV

So much of the prophecy of Hosea describes how Israel strayed from God’s guidance and love. He outlines how the people cultivated wickedness, perversity, falsehood, and trusted things of this world over God’s promises.

At some point, we have all walked away from the “cords of human kindness.” In my case, I ran away and jumped over the cliff. I could almost hear the devil urging me on to more deplorable actions. This was manifested when I was visiting my cousins, of which two would become future priests. The drinking and carousing was definitely orchestrated to lead all of us down a dark path. But something stopped us.

The next time I made plans to visit them, a very strong power kept me from doing so. Every time I started to pack or get the car ready, I felt physically restrained and heard “Don’t Go!” I would get ill at the thought of traveling to their home. The friends I had invited to go with me could not understand the change of plans or my absolute unwillingness to try and visit them again, but I knew. I never did make another trip to see them until we celebrated my cousin’s ordination.

The tender verse above gives us a vision of God’s ties of love to us all. Hosea says in Chapter 11, verse 9, “. . . For I am God and not man, the Holy One present among you; I will not let the flames consume you.” I am so thankful He rescued me and continues to do so!

Patty VerDouw

Day 8: Hosea 12-13

The main theme in these chapters is deceit. We humans have been idolaters since Eden. In Genesis 3:1-5, it is as if the serpent said, “God didn’t really say that. God isn’t who you think he is. God can’t, or won’t, do what HE says He will.” Our first step toward idolatry began with a lie. Eve believed the lie that God was not enough. In verse five, the serpent said to Eve, “In fact, God knows that when you eat it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” Eve believed the lie that she could be like God . . . her own god. The lie led to pride and the result was sin. Eve wasn’t unusual.

In Hosea’s day, we were still worshiping that same false god. Isaiah pleaded with Judah, just like Hosea pleaded with Israel, for us to put away our idols. Gomer believed the lie that her lovers gave her something Hosea wasn’t. Israel believed the lie that Baal could give them rain and fertility. Like Israel, we go after our “other lovers” (our idol trinkets) because we haven’t found our identity in God and we’re looking for something to esteem us. As our own idol, we try to find things to validate us. But no matter the chapter or verse in Hosea, the message is always the same. When we put God first, we have everything. When we put anything, including ourselves, before Him, we have nothing

Diane Schneider

Day 9: Hosea 14

“He who is wise will consider these words. He who is prudent will take note of them. For the paths of the Lord are smooth; The righteous can walk on them, While sinners stumble on them.” Hosea 14:10 (HEB)

I will admit a little pet peeve of mine, and a weakness as well. First the pet peeve: Lately in the news and all over social media, I see people bashing others over the head with Scripture in an attempt to prove what hypocrites they are, and to change their ways or else.

When discussing politics, or current events, I try to avoid scriptural references (especially on social media) unless someone asks, if it’s in private, or among other believers. Mostly. I’ve too often succumbed to that temptation. Was it helpful? Nope.

For anyone to use Scripture as a political weapon misses the reason why God inspired the writers of the Bible (which admittedly varies from book to book, sometimes chapter to chapter). As Hosea said, Scripture is meant to smooth the path of the righteous, but if someone is not righteous, those same words become a stumbling block.

And boy do I stumble, because I’m not as righteous as I sometimes (often) like to think I am. Before reciting Scripture (for whatever reason), I have to consider my motives. Do I intend to heal, inspire, encourage or sooth? Or something a bit more selfish?

Hosea warns us that we need to be careful how we use Scripture. Instead of finding ourselves on a nice, smooth path that glorifies God and leads us closer to Him, we will trip and fall flat on our face. And that helps no one. Plus, it kinda hurts.

Andra Marquardt