

Dunbarton Congregational Church
Sunday, August 5, 2007

9:30 a.m.

Hosea 11:1-11

“Marzipan Babies”

How many of you know what millions of Americans will be watching on TV this Tuesday evening at 8:00 p.m.? No, it's not American Idol—“Summer Beach and Bleach Edition;” no, it's not Antiques' Roadshow—“Decorative Spoon Collections That Will Put Your Child through College;” no it's not Discovery Channel—“Killer Sharks, Whales and Welsh Terriers.”

This Tuesday marks the debut of the hottest new game show in town, guaranteed to satisfy everyone's vicarious longing to drown their financial worries in a sea of riches. Called “Power of 10” and hosted by Drew Carey, the show polls thousands of people across America, then challenges contestants to guess the pulse of the nation. Questions range from “How many Americans believe they are smarter than President George W. Bush?” to “How many were chaste on their wedding day?” Don't dismiss these subjects as trivial! Answer just five of them correctly and you, too, can be ten million, that's right *ten million* dollars richer!

Now, because I am one of the 99.9% of Americans who wouldn't mind winning ten million dollars, I noticed that one can audition for the show by taking a practice test on the internet. I thought in deference to this opportunity and today's scripture lesson, we'd warm up today with a few “Power of 10” questions of our own. Answers are given as percentages. Are you ready?

1. How many people on earth have or have ever had ever had parents?
(What percentage?)
2. How many people on earth have ever disobeyed or disappointed their parents?
3. How many people on earth have ever taken their parents for granted?
4. How many *parents* on earth have ever wanted to strangle their children!

And here's the ten million dollar question . . .

5. How many people on earth have ever been *forgiven* by a parent who really just wanted to strangle them?

In the course of my parenting career, my boys almost burned down the McIntyre Ski Area, smashed a friend's bicycle to bits in our front yard and, and stole several large highway signs. One peed on the neighbor's tomato plants, another stole the hood ornament off a friend's Mercedes. Both snuck out of the house so often in high school, I'm surprised they remembered where home was. And if you think girls are perfect, in middle school I was known interchangeably as "clueless" and "the worst mother that ever lived."

At one point or another, I've been disregarded, disrespected, disobeyed and dishonored. And unless the children in your life are *exceptionally* perfect, I'm guessing that you, too, know what it's like to give and give and give and be royally disavowed. It's an awful feeling, one that reliably sends us over the top as we contemplate the underlying unfairness of it all--"I do so much for you, (fill in the blank). Is it too much to obey a few simple rules?"

Hosea captures this perfectly--God's fury and frustration with his children, the disobedient, ungrateful Israelites. Through him, God makes his case to his listeners: "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. I taught Ephraim to walk, I took them in my arms, I led them with cords of human kindness, with bands of love. I was to them like those who lift infants to their cheeks. I bent down to them and fed them. But the more I called them, the more they went from me; they kept sacrificing to the Baals, those nasty Canaanite fertility bulls!"

"That's it," says God, "I've had it!" "Israel, I'm going to send you to your room (exile you to Assyria); ground you for a year (return you to bondage in Egypt); give you a good spanking (the sword will rage in your cities). "See if I'll put myself out for you again!" (To the most high you'll call, but I will not raise you up at all!) There is nothing like a loving parent scorned, is there? And can we blame our mothers and fathers, can we blame God?

Someone recently shared with me a scene in which a six year old boy "copped some serious attitude," stomped his foot and told his mother she was "incompetent for the job!" We might find this humorous, but it reduced his poor mother to tears! We want so badly to be great parents, don't we, not

only of our own children, but of all the children in our lives? We want to provide them with what they need, what they desire, what will bring them wholeness and joy. “You want your freedom,” says God to the Israelites, “follow me to the Promised Land! You want kings like everyone else? Here’s Saul and David and Solomon! You want a great temple, and riches and power? I will make of you a great nation. All I ask is for your loyalty, and that you follow ten simple rules.”

Israel couldn’t comply, just as we don’t comply. The Northern and Southern Kingdoms were doomed. Israel fell to the Assyrians and Judah to the Babylonians and the rebellious Israelites were carted off into captivity to rethink their apostasies and reestablish their relationship with Yahweh.

Yet hear God’s Word in the midst of this drama, hear the good news as proclaimed by Hosea and embodied in Jesus, hear the gospel of love that by some divine spark even *we* have been known to utter: “How can I give you up, O Ephraim? How can I give up on you?” I imagine these words spoken as a sigh, the same exhalation that accompanies *every* act of profound forgiveness. If you’ve ever had a child you wanted to strangle, I know you know what I mean.



(Pick up photo) I found this photograph on the internet this week. It’s one I hope you place on your refrigerator or near your desk. Rumor has it this tiny baby and others like it are made of marzipan, ground almonds and egg whites and sugar blended into a delicate paste and molded like clay into fragile shapes.

Do you have a child in your life that's driving you crazy? Fix your eyes on this picture and remember who you are to him or her. Try it for a spouse, a family member, boss or co-worker who is testing your patience. Ponder what you mean or have meant to your *own* parents, a tiny bundle of hope they were instructed to cherish. We are all marzipan babies in the end, my friends--we are even marzipan *parents*--fragile, vulnerable, subject to imperfection, children of a loving God in whose palm we ultimately rest.

O, give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;" O so very good, says the Psalmist, "for his steadfast love endures forever." Indeed and Amen.