



Carstairs-Bancroft United Church

July 23, 2021

DAILY ENCOURAGEMENT DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC By Rev. Maria Szabone Berces



Source: Our Daily Bread

Beloved Carstairs Bancroft United Church Members,

Water is a carrier and provider of life on Earth. This is how the Creator fashioned this blue gem. Did you know that about 50-70% of water makes up our body weight? Scientists figured that a person can survive without water only for three to four days. The website of the Medical West Hospital states: "... *drinking enough [water] every day is essential for everything from maintaining a healthy weight to energy levels and flushing toxins out of the body.*" (<https://www.medicalwesthospital.org/are-you-drinking-enough-water.php>) The suggestion of this Alabama health institution match the recommendation of any doctors: "*Start with a commitment to drink a minimum of four to six 8 oz glasses of water every day, and adjust accordingly as needed.*"

I can see a parallel between this *commitment*, intentionally taking care of our physical health by paying attention to drinking enough water, and how we should handle our spiritual health.

The Scriptures tell us that our spiritual and mental health depend on our restored relationship with the One who "**knit us together in our mother's womb**" (Psalm 139). In this connection we find our yearnings fulfilled, we regain our purpose and peace. We are assured about our value, and that we are beloved as we are. In fact, this unconditional love of the Holy One has the capacity to actually bring out our fullest potential.

In my understanding the way to this wholeness and restoration has been cleared by Jesus the Christ. It is the Almighty who had the power to fix what was broken and clean what was gravely stained. As Prophet Isaiah put it: "**Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.**" (Isaiah 1:18) Jesus worded this to his disciples on the night before his death: "**This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.**" (Matthew 26:28)

Through this intimate relation with our Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer God we can experience flourishing and prosperity. We can find our true dwelling place, where we are nurtured and feel secure. It's a great gift, isn't it? However, this coin has another side, as well. And it is our answer to God approaching us. The Almighty communicates it through Hosea: "**Return ... to the Lord your God. ... Who is wise? Let them realize these things. Who is discerning? Let them understand.**" (Hosea 14:1; 9)

Returning, realizing and discerning... These are all actions that require our will and intentions. But as we take time and decide to set on this path, we have God's promise: "**I will heal their waywardness and love them freely ... I will be like the dew ...**" (Hosea 14:1; 9) And as Jesus said: "**Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.**" (John 7:38)

Grace and Peace to You All,

Rev. Maria



God's Restoring Ways

People will dwell again in his shade; they will flourish like the grain; they will blossom like the vine.

Hosea 14:7

READ Hosea 14

One of the most moving songs in the musical *The Greatest Showman* is "From Now On." Sung after the main character comes to some painful self-realizations about the ways he's wounded family and friends, the song celebrates the joy of coming back home and finding that what we already have is more than enough.

The book of Hosea concludes with a similar tone—one of breathless joy and gratitude at the restoration God makes possible for those who return to Him. Much of the book, which compares the relationship between God and His people to a relationship with an unfaithful spouse, grieves Israel's failures to love Him and live for Him.

But in chapter 14, Hosea lifts up the promise of God's boundless love, grace, and restoration—freely available to those who return to Him heartbroken over the ways they've abandoned Him (vv. 1–3). "I will heal their waywardness," God promises, "and love them freely" (v. 4). And what had seemed broken beyond repair will once more find wholeness and abundance, as God's grace, like dew, causes His people to "blossom like a lily" and "flourish like the grain" (vv. 5–7).

When we've hurt others or taken for granted God's goodness in our life, it's easy to assume we've forever marred the good gifts we've been given. But when we humbly turn to Him, we find His love is always reaching to embrace and restore. – By **Monica La Rose**

REFLECT & PRAY

Loving God and Creator of Life, teach me to trust in Your goodness—not just when I'm good, but all the time. Amen.

When have you experienced or witnessed restoration beyond what seemed possible? In what areas of your life do you need reassurance of God's promise to heal and restore?

SCRIPTURE INSIGHT

The story of Hosea is remarkable! God tells His prophet to marry a promiscuous woman (Hosea 1:2–3)—one who would be repeatedly unfaithful. Why would God command this? Hosea's sordid marriage to Gomer is a picture of the relationship between God and His unfaithful people. Israel and Judah were characterized by idolatry, a sin that included literal prostitution practiced by the cult of Baal. Gomer lives out this sin, and Hosea feels anguish similar to God's. The disloyalty of His people resembles Gomer's infidelity. Yet God instructs Hosea to rescue his wayward wife. Hosea buys her back from her life of prostitution (3:1–2). This is the stark and startling picture of how much God loves His people. – By **Tim Gustafson**

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