

The language, in our readings today and those of last night, seems very primal – part of that side of us which we try to keep very much under control: the language of feelings, employed here to describe God’s relationship to us and our relationship, both to one another and the rest of creation, summed up in the overriding importance of the one word – love. One senses that part of the distancing that actually goes on when we discuss such language, is to make sure that God doesn’t get caught up in our own problems of having to deal with the raw material of emotion. No, although all our own ‘negative’ emotions are on display here, both on God’s part and our own, they are only metaphorically of God; those terrible emotions behind the threats of vengeance, both in the passage from Hosea and the Book of Revelation; emotions carefully elided from this feast day in praise of love, but very much present in the original text:

*I shall make her as bare as the desert
I shall make her as arid country
and let her die of thirst.
And I shall feel no pity for her children . . .* Hosea 2:5.

And so on. What then of ‘love’? Is that, too, simply being used in a metaphorical way? If so, at what point, one might say, does God’s essence touch our own? Why should God have anything to do with us and we anything to do with God if ‘love’ is no more than a merely metaphorical description? Christ, of course, is the answer to that. In Christ, we see how God is; how God feels. And we see it, too, in his servants – all those who follow Christ and dare to take up the cudgels of obedience; not obedience to law but obedience to love. So, when we hear the story of Hosea and Israel as his errant wife, and of Martha and Mary and the one thing necessary, and of Benedict and Scholastica and which has the greater love, we also hear that very primal story being played out within each one of us between our various, often quite uncontrollable, emotions – and we ignore them at our peril, for they are not merely metaphors for who we are but of our essence; all of them, ‘good’ and ‘bad’. Perhaps, even, in one recent line of thought, the essence of our consciousness, of that unique identity which makes us uniquely human beings, both in relation to one another, to the rest of creation and to God and which, dare one say, makes God, too, unique to us. God is love, after all.

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