

When Israel Was A Child

A sermon preached by Ted Atkinson, Minister, Oxford Presbyterian Church, Oxford, PA on August 2, 1998.
Scripture lesson: Hosea 1:1-11.

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

When I was in 8th grade a classmate a classmate came to school with a black eye. "How'd you get the black eye?" "My old man slugged me." I couldn't believe him. My dad never hit me. When he was still healthy I once asked him why he never hit me. He said, "I'm afraid I'd hurt you." I couldn't conceive of a father hitting, physically abusing his son. Years after that incident I've come to realize that my classmate was probably telling the truth.

Several years ago my family went up to Lancaster to pick up a *Fresh Air Kid* from Queens, New York. Earlier that afternoon Philip had gotten stung by a bumble-bee near his eye. His eye swelled shut. While we were preparing to take home our *Fresh Air Kid* one of the *Fresh Air* administrators asked Philip what happened to his eye. He flippantly said, "My dad slugged me." She instantly snatched back our *Fresh Air Kid* until Philip said, "Just kidding. I got stung by a bee." Child abuse is not something to joke about. Today we realize that we've got to take seriously signs and accusations of physical or sexually abuse.

Our church wants to be preemptive in preventing any kind of child abuse. Jim Sumner, with the help of members of our congregation, came up with the Child Protection Policy which should be in everybody's bulletin this morning. As far as I know, we have never had an incident of child abuse in our church and we want to keep it that way.

Sometimes the God we've come to know through Jesus Christ is portrayed as an abusive parent. Feminist writers warn us of dangers in associating God with a Father who abuses us physically or emotionally or sexually. For example, the crucifixion of Jesus can be portrayed as an act of child abuse. Sometimes Christian evangelists say, "We are all hell deserving sinners. God is angry with sin. Even the least sin deserves God's wrath and curse. But God also loves us. So he punished Jesus for our sins." That's a terrible way to portray the meaning of the crucifixion, especially to a child who has suffered physical abuse. Sometimes God is portrayed as a sex abuser. The all powerful God asked the young Virgin Mary to be the mother of his son.

The Virgin said, "Let it be unto me according to your word." She's portrayed as the model for Christian submissiveness. She meekly submits to the will of a powerful person. I believe in the Virgin Birth but the way we explain it can be damaging to a victim of childhood sex abuse.

The God we worship, love and trust is a God who loves us unconditionally. Few people have described God's love for us better than the Old Testament prophet Hosea. "When Israel was a child, I loved him. I taught Ephraim to walk. I took them up in my arms. I healed them. 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. How can I give you up, Ephraim? My heart recoils within me; my compassion grows warm and tender. I will not execute my fierce anger." The God whom we know in Jesus Christ is a tender God with his children. Whatever discipline we experience at his hand is for building us up, not for tearing us down.

Bonnie MacKrell will now share with you a testimony related to what I've been talking about.
