

“Being Brought Back” Series - “Why I Don't Even Care About an iPhone 4S”

Hosea 6:1-6, 11:1-9

- Pastor Ken Nelson

“I was a little nervous and a little giddy sidling up to the counter at the Apple Store on the first day the new iPhone went on sale last month”. So began a roughly 28 paragraph, 1400 word essay entitled *“Why I bought and iPhone 4S”* by Associated Press Technology writer Rachel Metz in a recent edition of the Minot Daily News. (For the record, my message today runs a tad under 1200 words, and is titled *“why I don't even care if I ever buy a smart phone”* - much less one whose name, a proper noun, begins with a *lower* case vowel. Ms. Metz wrote of being nervous, “freaked out” is her precise description, at the thought of pulling the trigger on such a significant purchase – (modern vernacular for what we Lutherans call guilt) at leaving the friendly though occasionally unreliable confines of her previous smart phone domain...T-Mobile's Android G1.

It is not my desire, nor place, to cast a dim eye toward the intelligent minds that conceive of these devices – Steve Jobs, God rest your soul. The skill and imagination of such folks earn both my respect and envy. What spawns my concern, however, is our national concern over the performance and appearance of our phones! And that rational, bright human beings like Ms. Metz would actually become nervous and giddy over the purchase of one. And how her mind in the months running up to her fateful appointment at the iStore was cluttered with anxiety over the style, color, and applications potential of - a thing!

And how a thing like this smart phone could do so incredibly much, and she still agonized because she wasn't sure it could enough! *“I wanted it all. I wanted design and ease of use, a flexible operating system, a good on-screen keyboard and the ability to use third-party keyboard software for faster typing, an awesome touch screen and a built in camera that would replace my trusty digital camera.”* “Well...sheesh” I thought, *“who wouldn't?”* Oh...and it had to work equally well in her home and office and unfortunately, the older iPhone 4 only came with AT& T...she preferred Verizon. Her relief was palpable when she found the iPhone 4S was now compatible with the nice *“can you hear me now guy”*?

Ever the watcher for theological themes in modern American culture, I was fascinated when Ms. Metz concluded her essay with a confession...good I thought....all your misplaced guilt deserves an honest soul washing confession. She had been *tempted* – tempted to return to her old unreliable “T-Mobile” because of a pleading offer she got from them in the mail (*the mail...you mean...like...a letter?*) The sum and substance of the offer was *“return to your first love Rachel...come home to Droid...the most expensive phone we got is yours”*! But she overcame the urge, tossed the offer aside...and closed her essay so she could go play with her new love...iPhone 4S. I put the article aside, glad for potential sermon material for the week. What worries me is that a lot of people were glad she helped them navigate through their own heart rending conflict about whether to go to their nearest iStore or not.

“Return to your first love”. So much in sum and substance to the pleading of the prophets like Hosea to you and me. *“Come, let us return to the Lord...for he will heal us. Let us know, let us press on to know the Lord. When Israel was a child, I loved them...but the more I called them, the more they went from me”*. The prophets like Hosea pleaded with Israel like – then again unlike our e-stores and i-stores and network providers. To them your a digit on their income statement....to God you're the child he brought into the world.

But let's make an important distinction here...the prophets pleaded, but they did not beg. They spoke on behalf of the God who C.S. Lewis imagined in the Chronicles of Narnia as a Lion. This Lion whom the prophets from Elijah to Malachi spoke on behalf of was dangerous...but also good. Our text today lays that out in stark terms. The sum and substance of Hosea's essay to Israel was for her to wean herself from the gadgets of incense and idols, things that may have been new, different and exciting, but whose real life apps delivered far less than they promised, and who simply didn't have one for eternal life. Hosea's message to Israel was simple...good ones are....return to your first love, don't buy into new religious gadgets or providers....set them aside and come home.

So how does this relate to you and me? For starters, I fear, and I hope you do too, for a culture that studies tells us spend more time on its smart phone apps than in prayer. I fear for a culture, and I hope you do too, that would agonize over the network they are with more than the Bible they are in. I fear for a culture, and I hope you do too, that would make two year commitments in order to hold a stylish piece of plastic, and waver over filling out a pledge card to their church. I fear for a culture, and I hope you do too, that on Friday alone spent \$400 million on "*Call of Duty – Modern Warfare 3*", while the war on hunger – a clear call of duty to the Christian, is waged on far less.

But though I may fear for such a culture, I rejoice in the plain simplicity of God's offer to return. No premiums, except a simpler, saner way of life. A big commitment, but you won't be hounded to upgrade to something better every few months...because there is none better than your God. I rejoice, and I hope you do to, that the Lion of which Hosea speaks, the God of which we still speak, does not change. I rejoice, and I hope you do too, that in this season of discontent in our community, we can be giddy but we don't have to be nervous about returning to our old eternal provider, committing ourselves to God again, returning to our first love.

In humility, I have to make my own confession. I'm probably most put off by smart phones because I am not smart enough to operate one. So take my criticisms today with that rather honest grain of salt. No, I truly don't care if I ever own one, enjoy yours if you do. Just be sure it comes with an app for Hosea and the Prophets – which has this awesome link to Jesus and the gospels. Put it on your homescreen. Reading those guys wouldn't only be a good thing to do, it'd be really smart. AMEN