

Date: June 7, 2026 (2nd Sunday after Pentecost, series A) (Proper 5)

Title: “Honest to God”

Text: Hosea 5:15 – 6:6

¹⁵ [*The Lord said:*] “Then I will return to my place until they have borne their guilt and seek my face – in their misery they will earnestly seek me.”

^{6:1} “Come, let us return to the LORD.

He has torn us to pieces but he will heal us;

he has injured us but he will bind up our wounds.

² After two days he will revive us;

on the third day he will restore us, that we may live in his presence.

³ Let us acknowledge the LORD; let us press on to acknowledge him.

As surely as the sun rises, he will appear;

he will come to us like the winter rains, like the spring rains that water the earth.”

⁴ “What can I do with you, Ephraim? What can I do with you, Judah? Your love is like the morning mist, like the early dew that disappears. ⁵ Therefore I cut you in pieces with my prophets, I killed you with the words of my mouth; my judgements flashed like lightning upon you. ⁶ For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgement of God rather than burnt offerings.”

+++

I don’t know how much you’ve heard about Artificial Intelligence, but it seems to me there are two main reasons why a lot of people are hesitant to use it.

One is the “iffy” quality of AI’s content. It’s often called “slop.” The reason it’s called slop is because the answers that AI cranks out are based on whatever invisible, undifferentiated, unsubstantiated sources its “large learning models” happen to have vacuumed up from here, there, and everywhere on the internet. It’s true, some of those sources are world-class experts. But also in the slop are dubious and discredited sources—misinformation, disinformation, false information, you name it. It all goes into the blender, all together.

And because of that sloppy process, what AI produces *is* slop—some of the “bits” of which are totally fine, but some of which are clearly crappy. According to the Canadian Bar Association, for instance, **“Canadian courts and tribunals flagged at least 249 *fictitious* case citations”** in the last 2½ years—100 cases a year—**“spanning 45 different courts and tribunals, nationwide.”** In three-quarters of those cases, **“courts found or presumed that AI tools had *generated* [those] fake cases.”**¹ Our country’s judges and lawyers *know* about this problem, but the *deeper* problem is that the only way even *they* can tell *for sure* which AI results are true and which are false, is for them to *do their own research!* Which, of course, would undo the whole point of using AI in the first place. So if AI’s results are so uneven that even experts can’t trust them—why are we even doing this?

Besides that “slop” in AI’s results, though, the criticisms that I am the most troubled by have to do with the way *the very nature of AI* damages our understanding of who we are as human beings. In particular, AI corrodes the connection that God himself wants us to respect, between *who we are* and *what we do*.

Let me explain what I mean by that—first with regard to AI, then with regard to God.

¹ Tom Macintosh, “The Missing Defendant in Canada’s Fictitious Case Law Crisis.” *CBA National*, 23 April 2026. <https://nationalmagazine.ca/en-ca/articles/opinion/2026/the-missing-defendant-in-canada-s-fictitious-case-law-crisis>

If I choose to let AI “do my work for me,” I am (by that very decision itself) “stepping back” from my own personal involvement in that work, and reducing my investment in its results.

Maybe that doesn’t really matter, if all I’m asking AI to do is find me an objective answer to a hard problem. For instance, “What was the average temperature in June, in Parksville BC, from 1950 to 2000?” For a question like that—OK, great, sign me up, super! (AI is awesome!)

But as soon as I’m trying to do something *creative*—

- like writing a sermon (!), or a poem, or a song...
- or painting a portrait that *interprets* a certain person in a nuanced way...
- or addressing a moral issue that requires interpretation and nuance and balance, within a range of slippery factors—

well, in creative and *judgement*-based situations like those: I would be “abandoning my post” as a human being if I decided to “outsource” what I myself really think, feel, perceive, or believe.²

It’s true, objectively speaking, that my own work will never be as polished or perfect as something AI cranks out for me. But it will always be *mine!*—errors, wrinkles, idiosyncrasies, and all. And all of those oddities, you see, are what *make* me “me.” They are part of what God has given *me* to share with *you*. And *as* I share those things with you, I am allowing you to “see me as I really am”—which is what builds an honest and trusting relationship between us. I’m not hiding myself away behind some buffed-up, manicured caricature of a real human being.

This is why many of the media organizations I follow emphasize their *requirement* that all of their writers “do their own work”—*no* AI allowed (within the writing process).³ Those organizations recognize that we become a little less human when we let a machine “do our hard thinking” for us. Again, asking AI to do routine or more-or-less objective things like digging up data, suggesting a restaurant, or finding out who did what in history—all of that is fine! But when I sit down to do a task that requires *me* to be fully present, with all of the “personhood” I possess (nuance, judgement, perception, proportion, interpretation)—it’s in *those* sorts of situations that outsourcing myself to AI *diminishes the fullness of who I am*, in a way that affects *both* of us.

That, of course, is the matching piece on the other side. *You* are diminished too, if you *consume* something that I have produced with AI. If you *know* that’s how I’ve done it—OK, at least then you are *aware* that that wasn’t totally my own work. But to me, there’s still a bit of a problem there, sort of like what used to happen (years ago) when a boss would have his secretary make what ought to have been his own *personal* phone call—like offering his condolences when somebody died, or wishing happy birthday to his mom. That was tacky at best. But imagine getting a birthday greeting (or a condolence card) from somebody today, and *finding out later* that it was a machine that came up with those words. That’s when I would start to get upset. (*Really? You let me just assume that those words were yours?*)

I don’t want to overreact here. I suppose a case could be made that AI-generated greetings are OK in some situations. But the case hardly even *needs* to be made at all, that *most* of our

² See Rebecca Winthrop, “What 370,000 College Essays Tell Us About A.I.’s Effects on Creativity.” *The New York Times*, May 27, 2026. [https://www.nytimes.com/2026/05/27/opinion/writing-creativity-ai.html?campaign_id=9&emc=edit_nn_20260527&instance_id=176239&nl=the-morning®i_id=124429256&segment_id=220527&user_id=e44095ba15066dc1ab7a5cc01e71251e](https://www.nytimes.com/2026/05/27/opinion/writing-creativity-ai.html?campaign_id=9&emc=edit_nn_20260527&instance_id=176239&nl=the-morning®i_id=124429256&segment_id=220527&user_id=e44095ba15066dc1ab7a5cc01e71251e;);

Charlie Warzel, “The Feel of Control Slipping Away.” *The Atlantic*, May 31, 2026. <https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/2026/05/ai-agents-agency-crisis-humanity/687379/>

³ Jimmy Thomson, “Why We Still Have Typos.” *Canada’s National Observer*. June 2, 2026. <https://mailchi.mp/nationalobserver/why-we-still-have-typos-ps?e=b088310039>

interactions in life really do *require* us to *be ourselves*! Again, that is especially true in interactions that depend on creativity, emotion, judgement, moral reasoning, or relationships. *Then*, we *need* to show up *as* ourselves—even though we are not perfect. In fact, it is *especially* when we are not perfect, that we really *need* to “show up” with all of the full human presence God has given us.

That, in a nutshell, is what today’s Old Testament reading is all about. And this is not some AI-generated interpretation of Hosea 5 and 6, but *my own personal reading* of this reading—supported by research I myself personally did, in my own personal library full of actual physical books. As I see it, what God is really after, here in this reading, is for Israel to be honest, and to deal with *him* honestly. Instead of ducking behind a mask that *only just* “says suitable words,” the people of God owe it to God to come clean with him, and *be* who they *are*.

All the way through the book of Hosea, you see, God is working like crazy to *engage* with his people in an honest and up-front way. But on their side, Israel just keeps on pretending. They play games with God... they change their minds... they say one thing and do another... they “nod in God’s general direction,” then gallop off to do what they want. Finally, God has gotten to the point (here at the end of Hosea 5) of having enough! **“That’s *it*!”** (God says); **“I am going to return to my place until they have borne their guilt and [really, truly] seek my face.”** *Maybe* (God thinks)—**“in their misery, they will earnestly seek me!”** (5:15)

So, what happened? As soon as God said *that*, we heard Israel’s response. And on the surface, their words were perfect! That is probably why many of the scholars who have studied this passage conclude that the people who were mouthing these things, were sincere.

“Come, let us return to the Lord,” they said.

“He has torn us to pieces, but he will heal us;

he has injured us, but he will bind up our wounds.

After two days he will revive us;

on the third day he will restore us, that we may live in his presence!

Let us acknowledge the Lord; let us press on to acknowledge him!

As surely as the sun rises, he will appear;

he will come to us like the winter rains,

like the spring rains that water the earth.” (Hos 6:1-3)

On the surface, that speech “says all the right things”! Its style is an excellent example of Hebrew poetry, and its content *totally* makes it sound like Israel is “really and truly” repenting of its sin and longing for God’s forgiveness.

What tips us off, though, that that *might not* have actually been true, is God’s response. He is nobody’s fool, and his “slop-detector” works perfectly every time. His response to this “confession” is devastating. He exposes Israel’s words for the sham that they were.

“What can I do with you, Ephraim?” God asks. (That’s a fancy name for the northern part of the kingdom of Israel.)

“What can I do with you, Judah?” (That’s the southern half.)

“Your love is like the morning mist, like the early dew that disappears!” There’s nothing *really there*, in other words! Israel’s whole “confession” was a calculated set of clichés that didn’t actually convey anything at all about what was really going on in their hearts.

“Come, let us return to the Lord,” they had said—not because they *wanted* to go back, but because they knew that that was the right thing to say.

“He has torn us to pieces, but he will heal us”—in other words, “We know he’ll come around for us, when we make all the right noises.”

“After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will restore us!”—Hey, this won’t even take very long, God is so easy to manipulate!

“Let us acknowledge the Lord; let us press on to acknowledge him”—Translation: “These are the words God *wants* us to say: So here they are, Lord; Now, are we *good*?”

Well: as we heard, No, they weren’t. The *reason* they weren’t “good with God” is because God is never satisfied with perfect words that we cover ourselves up with, on the surface, to make ourselves sound good. Do you remember what Jesus said about that, when he taught his disciples The Lord’s Prayer? **“When you pray,”** Jesus said, **“do not ‘heap up empty phrases’ the way the pagans do. They assume that they will be heard because of their many words.”** (Matt 6:7) No! What God is “really after” is not our words, but us!

- Not our *image*, but our being.
- Not who we *make ourselves out to be* on social media, but who we really are, in life.
- Not some AI-generated avatar, but a real human being.

So, here in Hosea, God is *ruthless* with the people of Ephraim and Judah.

“Your love is like the morning mist,” God says—**“like the early dew that disappears!”** (There’s nothing to it! There’s no *there*, there!) (v.4)

That is why (God says) **“I have *cut you in pieces* with my prophets... I have *killed you with the words of my mouth*... and I have let my judgement *flash like lightning* onto you.”** (v.5) I *know* you can do better than you have been doing, with all these superficial attempts to make a good impression.

“What I *really want*” from you (God says), **“is mercy, not sacrifice—and [true] acknowledgement of God, rather than burnt offerings.”** (v.6)

In this sense, the temptations that AI is confronting us with today, are not very different at all from the mess those Israelites found themselves in, 700-and-some years before Christ. All of us human beings have *always* been tempted to “keep God at arm’s length” by hiding ourselves away behind a shield of perfect-but-empty words.

That is why we, too—like those ancient Israelites—need to *hear* God’s own *personal* and *authentic* voice speaking to us today, in all of our readings, and *take it seriously*! All of these readings tell us that—

- God is *not* “one to be trifled with.”
 - We *cannot* pull the wool over his eyes, or slide something clever past his “slop detector.”
 - If we *do* try to give God “slop,” he will call us on it—for our sake as well as his!
- He, our creator, *deserves* better—and we, his creatures, have a *duty* to be “honest with God.”

That, you see, is why Abraham was commended so highly by St. Paul in our second reading, from Romans chapter 4. **“Abraham,”** Paul said, **“is the father of us all.”** (Rom 4:16) Why? Because Abraham **“faced the fact that his own body was as good as dead (since he was about 100 years old)—and that Sarah’s womb was also dead.”** EVEN SO, Paul says—even so!—**“Abraham did not *waver* through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but he was *strengthened* in his faith and gave glory to God, being *fully persuaded* that God had the power to do what he had promised.”** (Rom 4:19-21)

That’s a call to us, too, to be *honest* with God—and then, by extension, also with each other! Like Abraham, you and I can *trust* that God will *not* reject us in our weakness, or push us away in our shame. His very character is to be **“the God who gives *life* to the dead, and *calls* things ‘that**

are not' as though they were!" (Rom 4:17) Like Abraham, you and I *can* be *dead* (spiritually speaking, for sure—and even, eventually, physically too)—and still have hope. Like Sarah, we can be *sterile* (before God and others)—yet still be strong.

From another angle—like Matthew in today's Gospel reading, you and I can *abandon* our empty dream of being powerful "people of means." Matthew would have *seemed* to "have it all," in his society, as a wealthy and powerful tax collector. But Jesus saw the real Matthew, right through that smokescreen. Jesus knew who Matthew was—and called him anyway! And like Abraham, far in the past, Matthew too understood (when Jesus called him) that he could drop his defences, and throw away his mask, and follow his Saviour along a new and honest path that was full of truth and forgiveness. (Matt 9:9)

Near the end of his second letter to the Christians in Corinth, Paul tells them, "**I am not seeking *what is yours, but you.***" (2 Cor 12:14) That's how it *always* is, between God and us. He is not the least bit interested in the perfect image of who we think we need to be, to please him. What he wants is our honesty about who we truly are.

For that is when *he*, on *his* side, becomes who *he* truly is: "**the God who gives life to the dead, and calls things that are not as though they were!**" (Rom 4:17)

May God grant each of us, and all of us, that same saving combination of honesty and trust! In the name of Jesus, dear friends: AMEN.