

Hosea 2:14–23 “Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her. [15] And there I will give her her vineyards and make the Valley of Achor a door of hope. And there she shall answer as in the days of her youth, as at the time when she came out of the land of Egypt.

[16] “And in that day, declares the LORD, you will call me ‘My Husband,’ and no longer will you call me ‘My Baal.’ [17] For I will remove the names of the Baals from her mouth, and they shall be remembered by name no more. [18] And I will make for them a covenant on that day with the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens, and the creeping things of the ground. And I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land, and I will make you lie down in safety. [19] And I will betroth you to me forever. I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy. [20] I will betroth you to me in faithfulness. And you shall know the LORD.

[21] “And in that day I will answer, declares the LORD,
I will answer the heavens,
and they shall answer the earth,
[22] and the earth shall answer the grain, the wine, and the oil,
and they shall answer Jezreel,
[23] and I will sow her for myself in the land.
And I will have mercy on No Mercy,
and I will say to Not My People, ‘You are my people’;
and he shall say, ‘You are my God.’” (ESV)

After the events of this week, I have determined to work more diligently and finish my sermon earlier in the week! I was in a Zoom meeting Wednesday afternoon with some dear friends that are local pastors. As you can imagine, our planned topic of conversation was set aside and we lamented and prayed, thinking through how to lead and respond to what was surely something of great significance.

One of these brothers shared his concern that what he had planned for the Sunday sermon seemed inadequate. Even if he was going to preach the sermon on joining small groups, he had to say something - speak into the shared experience of the congregation.

The facilitator of the meeting noticed I had been quiet through the whole conversation, which you might imagine is not the way things usually are! “Jonathan, you have been silent,” he said, “what are you planning on preaching on this Sunday?”

“Idolatry and the whoredom of Israel.” Was my response. Timely for sure.

Without a doubt, we find ourselves in the midst of the greatest contemporary wave of Christian nationalism and the syncretism of politics and faith - the championing of an affront to the Kingdom of Christ from pulpits and pundits throughout our land. All of which has devolved into a disdain for neighbor where there is to be love, hatred of the foreigner or sojourner where there is to be hospitality, a devaluing of who we perceive are the least where there is supposed to be advocacy.

And that is just in the church...

But if these things were not true. If we reclaimed a nostalgic suburban dream of the 1950s, crew cuts and casseroles, church attendance, and quiet steady labor, even then Hosea would have a word for us. It is the declaration of the human inclination and the overriding love and mercy of God for those that don't recognize their grave sin and unfaithfulness.

Yahweh, God alone is merciful.

We begin today a series in the Minor Prophets. For 12 weeks we will hear the whispers and bullhorns of the prophets and determine to hear what they say of God, what they say of Jesus our Savior.

Who are the prophets? We must not sentimentalize them. They were hated by their peers. But they spoke for God. A prophet in the Old Testament frame is despised by their audience. While a remnant might heed their calls, they spoke with precision and against the very things that nations claiming to serve God had come to love and cherish. Their work is not merely forecasting of future events but an uncovering of disobedience and sin.

And while the role of the prophet may have shifted in the New Testament church, the voice of these prophets remain as clarion calls back to relationship with God.

Hosea was called to serve a corrupt society and an unfaithful church. For nearly sixty years he was called to be God's mouthpiece, to confront a nation spiraling into decay.

In the 8th century BC, through the reign of four kings in Judah. With direct condemnation of Israel and warning for Judah.

Entering into his world: “Socially, there was a growing gap between rich and poor, a breakdown in public morality and a corrupt legal system. God described the state of the culture as follows: ‘There is only cursing, lying, and murder, stealing and adultery; they break all bounds, and bloodshed follows bloodshed’ (Hosea 4:2)

“Politically, turmoil arose when King Jeroboam’s son, Zechariah, was assassinated in 745 BC after sitting on the throne for only six months. In the following twelve years, five different kings would come to rule Israel and four of them would be assassinated. In addition to the internal social and political turmoil, Israel was under constant fear of invasion from what was then the world’s greatest empire - Assyria. In 722 BC, after Hosea’s prophetic ministry had ended, Israel was, in fact, conquered by the Assyrians and the people of Israel were deported.” - Anthony Selvaggio

Rooted in the promise of being God’s people, the vine had become twisted and distorted by human aspiration and rejection of the One who called them his own.

And Hosea’s life becomes the imagery of how God was working and how the people were responding. His story was an illustration of the sermon he was preaching.

Told to find a wife who would be unfaithful, he marries Gomer. And their children born names hinting at the need for redemption. She was never settled. Never comfortable, or satisfied with Hosea and she would often stray to other lovers, eventually getting so bad that she is sold into slavery (which shows the perversion of the culture). And Hosea as her husband must purchase his wife back, redeeming her and telling her that he will be her only husband.

This redemption, unfolding through the witnessed life of Hosea, becomes a picture of God and his people. God and us.

What does this story say of God?

God demands exclusivity.

The image God gives the nations is of covenant, of marriage. **Hosea 1:2** “When the LORD first spoke through Hosea, the LORD said to Hosea, “Go, take to yourself a wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom, for the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the LORD.” (ESV)

Israel had forsaken Yahweh. Their anchor, their provision, their God.

They had taken to worshipping other gods, adopted the seasonal pagan ceremonies as their own. While maintaining that they were God's chosen people, they lived untethered from the name on their banners.

Israel treated the relationship like an open marriage, they expected faithfulness from God but gave themselves the right to play and become bound to others, only coming "home" when it was convenient.

And because of this, discipline was coming. They would be a failed people and nation.

Some of it happened quickly for them, embracing the worship that existed among others in their neighborhood. But mostly it was a slow fade into unfaithfulness.

A watering down of the truth and life God had called them to and syncretism, a blending or equating of other values and desires with their faith.

Adding to God until he was no longer God... Making what was intended to be sipped neat into a mixed drink to intoxicate the worst in them.

Think of it as adding to something healthy that makes it worse for you. Brussel sprouts but with bacon and balsamic vinegar.

Taking God at his word, sitting under the teaching of Jesus and what he has commissioned us to, it can be a hard meal to consume, but when we take away from it or add to it to make it more palatable over time we have corrupted the meal and rejected the master.

"Our idolatries are less like conscious decisions to believe a falsehood and more like learned dispositions to hope in what will disappoint. Our idolatries are not intellectual; they are affective—instances of disordered love and devotion. Idolatry is caught more than it is taught. We practice our way into idolatries, absorb them from the water in which we swim. Hence our idolatries often reflect the ethos of our environments."

James KA Smith

It wasn't just Israel's problem, Judah was in danger, humanity throughout history, and the church today struggles with the lure of other lovers. God demands exclusivity - that he alone would be worshiped, embraced, obeyed.

That is terrible news given the substantial evidence that Israel, and we are incapable of casting off idolatry on our own. Remember, we hate our prophets because they speak plainly about our idols, our precious lesser husbands.

It is the first verse of the news we call good. Like Israel, we are sinners in need of saving, in need of rescue from ourselves and the foolishness we have made most important.

But there is more revealed of God in Hosea.

God is Merciful.

Throughout there is the call back to God, to faithfulness, to home. He does the redeeming, the tender embrace of those that wear the filth of their disregard of him.

In spite of what is deserved, his people can come home again.

Hosea 2:19–20 “And I will betroth you to me forever. I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy. [20] I will betroth you to me in faithfulness. And you shall know the LORD.” (ESV)

Hosea 14:4–7 “I will heal their apostasy; I will love them freely, for my anger has turned from them. [5] I will be like the dew to Israel; he shall blossom like the lily; he shall take root like the trees of Lebanon; [6] his shoots shall spread out; his beauty shall be like the olive, and his fragrance like Lebanon. [7] They shall return and dwell beneath my shadow; they shall flourish like the grain; they shall blossom like the vine; their fame shall be like the wine of Lebanon.” (ESV)

He extends mercy. Mercy is seeing the truth of what you deserve and giving you something better. Where judgment and prison are warranted, God gives you freedom.

Like Hosea reclaiming his wife at the auctioneer’s stage, God comes for us. In Christ, we have experienced the redemption pictured in Hosea. In the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, God gives us what we could never deserve (life and righteousness, an inheritance) and he takes what we deserve (punishment for infidelity) upon himself.

"God loves us in just this way, he goes after us at our worst, keeps after us until he gets us, and makes lovers of men and women who have known nothing of real love. Once we absorb this story in the words that flow from it, we will know God far more accurately."
Eugene Peterson

This is where we realize renewed first love, exclusive love.

Jesus is the faithful son in our place, where Israel could not be, his obedience and fidelity becomes yours.

Jesus is the faithful husband paying the price to reclaim you with his own blood.

"In Jesus, our waywardness is healed. In Jesus, we freely receive the love of God. In Jesus, God's anger is turned away from us. In Jesus, we receive incomparable love."
Salvaggio

The sooner we see ourselves in Gomer, the sooner we will be free from the lure to idolatry and the slow fade into rejecting the way of the Kingdom, the way of life in Christ.

He is still exclusive, but his mercy keeps you.

John 14:6 "Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (ESV)

We rejoice in this. But we have to keep our wits about us. The church now, me today, are prone to whoredom - the serpent still whispers, and tweets, and texts...

For most of us, it won't even be politics, but something will demand a place above faith. Maybe you have encountered it, politically, but also in little ways of hating enemies where we are called to love them. A determined self-sovereignty over God.

When we take our eyes off of Christ and look for satisfaction elsewhere.

"Human desire is infinite by its nature; it cannot be satisfied..." "Desire is infinite partly because we were made by God, made for God, made to need God, and made to run on God. We can be satisfied only by the one who is infinite, eternal, and able to supply all our needs; we are only at home in God." "When we fall away from God, the desire for

the infinite remains, but it is displaced upon things that will certainly lead to destruction.” Dallas Willard

Because that is true we endeavor to take the word unadulterated. Cling not to “your truth” but his truth. Israel becomes a warning to us so that we can find mercy in Christ.

Romans 9:22–26 “What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, [23] in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory—[24] even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles? [25] As indeed he says in Hosea,

“Those who were not my people I will call ‘my people,’
and her who was not beloved I will call ‘beloved.’”

[26] “And in the very place where it was said to them, ‘You are not my people,’ there they will be called ‘sons of the living God.’” (ESV)

Humbled, sober, ready to shed anything that hinders us from seeing Jesus, we come back over and over again. To the mercy of Christ. To his faithfulness to us.

"You have the right to change your mind. Don't let anybody make you think you don't. It is a God-given right & the essence of repentance. You have the right to reconsider, to study the fruit of any tree, search your own soul & take an honest look at how you've been indoctrinated." Beth Moore

Hosea 6:1–3 “Come, let us return to the LORD; for he has torn us, that he may heal us; he has struck us down, and he will bind us up. [2] After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him. [3] Let us know; let us press on to know the LORD; his going out is sure as the dawn; he will come to us as the showers, as the spring rains that water the earth.” (ESV)

Mercy received in Christ. Made exclusive with our God, not tripping with princes, parties, postures. He alone saves, he alone is merciful. He alone is our king, our God.

Humbly we come in repentance, for the ways we have let idolatry corrupt faith, for the ways we have been unfaithful. And he welcomes us, renewing passion in us.

Unadulterated commitment and desire for the Lord is our goal, and we learn it together as a people claimed by Christ.

1 Peter 2:9–10 “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. [10] Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.” (ESV)

This is now what we portray to the world, on mission with Jesus redeeming the least, advocating for the oppressed, loving our neighbor, and seeking the good of the city. Humbly choosing joy in knowing Jesus.

“This prophetic book sobers us and fills us with renewed hope. As ugly as Israel’s adulterous faithlessness has been, it cannot extinguish God’s resilient redemptive love and mercy.” GTB

May we be anchored in this mercy and kept by his Spirit, as faithful citizens of his kingdom.