

St. Luke's Evangelical Lutheran Church -- Watertown, WI  
Pastor Mark Gartner  
Sermon for Pentecost 3 -- June 26<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup>, 2014

### **Hosea 5:15 – 6:6**

**Then I will go back to my place until they admit their guilt. And they will seek my face; in their misery they will earnestly seek me. 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. 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." "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. Therefore I cut you in pieces with my prophets, I killed you with the words of my mouth; my judgments flashed like lightning upon you. For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings.**

Dear children of God,

How do you make sense of the troubles that come into your life? Where do you turn for help? One of God's Old Testament prophets, Hosea, dealt with those questions among his fellow countrymen, the people of Israel.

Hosea served as a prophet in Israel during the prosperous high point of the reign of Jeroboam II, around 760 B.C. until the fall of the capital city, Samaria, and the end of Northern Israel as a nation in 722 B.C. Israel's history was one of spiritual adultery. Although God was faithful to them, they were unfaithful to him. Instead of loving and serving him, they paid lip service to him and worshipped and served the false gods of the Canaanites. So God used Hosea's ministry as a "living sermon" to show Israel their sin of spurning his amazing love for them. He commanded Hosea to marry a prostitute named Gomer. Hosea was to love her and accept as his own the children she had borne through her adulterous relationships. The LORD blessed Gomer and Hosea with a daughter and two sons, but in time she went back to her old ways. Instead of letting Hosea divorce her, as he had every right to do, God told him to show his love to her again, give her new lover a sum of money to give her up, and bring her back home as his wife again. **"Love her as the LORD loves the Israelites, though they turn to other gods."** (Hosea 3:1) In this way Hosea was showing Israel their sin and God's amazing grace.

If you are disgusted and appalled by Gomer's brazen, shameful sin, then you have some idea of what God thinks of our sins. We think our sins are fairly tame and harmless compared to hers, but every sin declares independence from God and separates us from him because with every sin we are regarding something else more important and precious than God and his will. That means every sin is some form of idolatry, and as God warns, **"because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient."** (Ephesians 5:6). We, too, are brazen, fickle, and adulterous. And to plead ignorance of our sins, to say we don't know any better, is no excuse. As God told the Israelites, **"my people are destroyed for lack of knowledge."** (Hosea 4:6)

God is patient, but God also is just. There comes a time when sin's consequences must catch up with those who are unrepentant. We reap what we sow. After years of rejecting their spiritual husband, the LORD permitted the Assyrian army to sweep over the land like a lion tearing its prey to pieces. God's people were taken as prisoners of war and dispersed among other nations. Their nation existed no more. Yet this, too, was a display of his faithful love for sinners. Perhaps when they have exhausted their supply of earthly helpers, when they have lost everything and are in the misery of captivity, perhaps they will remember their LORD, admit their guilt, and turn to him for healing. **"I will tear them to pieces and go away; I will carry them off with no one to rescue them. Then I will go back to my place until they**

**admit their guilt. And they will seek my face; in their misery they will earnestly seek me.” (Hosea 5:14,15)** And so it is for you and me.

**Sermon Theme: God Tears Apart So He Can Heal**

- 1. Sin always brings pain**
- 2. But God’s grace always brings healing**

### **1. Our sin always brings pain (“He has torn us to pieces”)**

“*God tears apart*”. The popular image so many people have of God today is that he is a soft, naïve, pampering grandparent who pats heads, smiles, and tells people to try and be good, but he understands if they don’t. That isn’t how God describes himself in the Bible. He is a just God who hates sin – a lion who tears us apart with the blunt, painful, necessary truth about our sin. God adds both spiritual and physical misery to sin in order to turn us from it, to lead us to see the cause and depth of the problem in our hearts, to bring us to our knees in repentance and to seek the only answer in him. When he left King David alone to wallow in the guilt of his adulterous affair with Bathsheba and murder of her husband, David’s conscience made his life miserable. **“My bones wasted away through my groaning all day long, for day and night your hand was heavy upon me”** (Ps 32:3). Sin always brings pain.

But we hate to see our sin. We refuse to put our initials on it and claim it as ours. When suffering comes into our lives, as it did for Israel, our first reaction is to blame someone or something else as the cause of our troubles. We don’t like to think that all our troubles are like the weeds and thistles that grew in Adam’s garden as a result of sin, that God allows problems in our life to keep us from becoming comfortable with our sin, that he sends them to remind us how terrible sin is, that he wants us to remember how much we need his grace and forgiveness. No, our greatest need is not for a comfortable life but for a strong relationship with him. God is treating us as his children and disciplining those he loves.

The LORD said, **“I will go back to my place until they admit their guilt. And they will seek my face; in their misery they will earnestly seek me.”** Sure enough, the very next verse begins, **“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.”** What a beautiful confession of faith! But as we read further we find that their words were insincere. There was no repentance. These were the words of a wife caught in adultery, trying to get on her husband’s good side so he will take her back, acting as if she’d done nothing wrong. He’d taken them back before. He’d do it again. Like people who worship false gods, the Israelites offered prayers and heaped gifts before the LORD so he would make their lives better again. It’s like the child who thinks that “I’m sorry” are magic words to get his parents off his back when he isn’t sorry at all.

How easy it is for you and me to take God’s grace for granted! When God proclaims his law to us he intends it to cut us to the heart and tear us to pieces, but it’s easy to tune him out and not take it to heart because we take for granted that God will forgive. When we speak the confession of sins God is seeking a broken and contrite heart that turns to him for pardon and peace, but it so easy to speak those words as a thoughtless ritual we need to do as part of the service. Like Israel, it is easy to recite the right words and sing the right songs and make the right offerings like a religious formula to get on God’s good side so he will treat us nice the rest of the week. It’s really no different than an idolater offering grain or an animal to butter up his false god.

Forgive us, LORD. Forgive us for failing to see that our greatest needs are in our heart and not in the life that surrounds us. Forgive us for working so hard to avoid the pain of admitting, *“Father, I’ve sinned.”* Forgive us for thinking that something we do brings your blessings to us. Forgive us for thinking that worship is a religious duty to fulfill instead of a joyful response to the blessings we’ve already received from you. Our sin always brings pain. Help us to trust that your grace always brings healing.

## 2. God's grace always brings healing

**“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.”** God's acts of discipline are never random, thoughtless, or heartless. He never sends us anything that is not for our good. It's the same with his grace. God always gives us his grace carefully, at the right time, and always to heal the wounds sin has caused in our hearts and lives. Sometimes to get to the root of the problem the healer needs to go deep. The surgeon must sometimes cut deep inside to remove a cancerous tumor. Sometimes mom must dig deep to remove a splinter. It hurts, but we trust the skill of the doctor's hands and the love in Mom's hands. It hurts, but they relieve the pain.

And God acts quickly. **“After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will restore us, that we may live in his presence.”** This is God's way of saying, *“Help is on the way, and it will come quickly.”* God always acts at just the right time. When we need to hear that our sins are forgiven God doesn't wait to tell us. He tells us right away. In fact, our sins were forgiven thousands of years ago when Jesus died on the cross. The only thing we are waiting for is that truth to sink into our hearts. That's why we need to hear it again and again.

So let us **“press on to acknowledge him.”** Let us go after his Word and promises, for **“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.”** When we look closely at the sermon that Hosea was preaching through his life and marriage and forgiveness of his adulterous wife Gomer, we begin to see more clearly the picture God is giving to us as lost sinners and how he forgives us over and over. If we were Hosea we might have HAD an extremely hard time marrying a woman like Gomer in the first place - and then to take her back after she'd run off to be with another guy? No way. Yet she is what you and I and all sinners have been to God over and over. But God has done what no mere human could or would do. God has loved us, suffered and died for our unfaithfulness, bought us with his own blood, looked for us, found us, and taken us back again and again. His mercies are new every morning.

How can we return our love to him? By worshiping him in our everyday lives and showing mercy and patience and love and forgiveness to others as God has shown to us. Then our worship in this building will be the highlight of our worship week and the beginning of another. Amen.