

Sunday Sermon: October 6, 2019

Sermon Text: Hosea 3:1-5

Sermon Theme: God is Faithful Even When we are Not

The LORD said to me, “Go, show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another and is an adulteress. Love her as the LORD loves the Israelites, though they turn to other gods and love the sacred raisin cakes.”

<sup>2</sup> So I bought her for fifteen shekels of silver and about a homer and a lethek of barley. <sup>3</sup> Then I told her, “You are to live with me many days; you must not be a prostitute or be intimate with any man, and I will live with you.”

<sup>4</sup> For the Israelites will live many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred stones, without ephod or idol. <sup>5</sup> Afterward the Israelites will return and seek the LORD their God and David their king. They will come trembling to the LORD and to his blessings in the last days.

What is the thing that hurts the most? Many people will say the thing that what hurts the most is when a loved one lets them down. A parent promises the child that they will be at the game or activity and they don't make it. You share something private with a trusted friend and they betray your confidence. A spouse who has promised to love and cherish you fails to live up to those promises.

Any time we put our trust in someone and they fail to live up to that trust we are hurt by it. The more we love and trust them, the more it hurts.

We often struggle with forgiveness when we are hurt this way. The pain lingers. The feelings and emotions stay with us make us angry all over again even after time has passed. We think we have put it behind us, but something sparks it all over again.

There is nothing as special as the relationship that God has made with us. Our Savior, Jesus, has given everything so that we can be God's children and heirs of eternal life. As God's children, he wants us to look to him for all that we need and trust him with our whole heart.

Yet, too often instead of fearing, loving and trusting in God as we should, we break that special relationship by sinning against him. What is God's reaction when we do this to him? In the Word of God before us this morning we see that God is faithful to us and forgives us, even when we are not faithful to him.

In our readings this morning we have already had 3 pictures of this theme of God's love and faithfulness for unfaithful people. Let's look at the unfaithfulness first. In our first lesson, we see that the God of love heard the cries of his people who had been held in slavery for hundreds of years. He answered those calls by bringing the people out of that slavery. Already in this short time, they had seen the Lord's miraculous hand save them from the Egyptians with the plague of the firstborn. They had seen his power by destroying the Egyptian army with the parting of the Red Sea. They saw the wisdom of God lead them with the pillar of fire and cloud.

How did they thank God who had brought them out of and destroyed Egypt without them having to raise a finger? As soon as they thought that God did not have his eye directly on them, they complained about being in the wilderness. They went to Aaron and told him that God had deserted them. They made new gods for themselves and worshipped them with a drunken orgy.

As we saw in that first lesson, God's anger over sin is very real. When he sees sin he does not tolerate it. As he saw the sin of his people, he had every reason to destroy them.

God also had every reason to destroy Paul. When Paul calls himself the worst of sinners that is not just a figure of speech, he really means it. Paul asks us to compare. He says that if you put your sins against mine, I bet I have more.

The name Saul struck fear in the heart of a Christian. Saul was the agent of the government to root out Christianity and to end it. Saul was the Joseph McCarthy of his day tracking down and trying to end the evil that he saw. God had every reason to look down on this man who was arresting and murdering Christians and to let his anger loose. If there was anyone who deserved a lightning bolt from heaven to strike him down it was Paul based on his rejection of the truth of Jesus and the lengths he went to stamp out Christianity around him.

Finally in our Gospel, we see the foolish sheep. Herd animals are herd animals because they realize that it is usually safer in the herd. The foolish sheep wanders away into the thicket, down the river and away from the herd and is lost.

The shepherd has every reason to keep the other sheep safe. He has every reason to write off that one foolish sheep because he still has 99 others. He might even be better off without that one sheep because in the future it might wander away again and lead the other sheep astray.

In each of these cases, to our human way of thinking it would make sense for God to cut his losses and start over. To get rid of those who are not faithful and to move on to someone else, but that is not what God does. In his love God is faithful even when we aren't.

Each of these readings show us our unfaithfulness and the love of God in his faithfulness. However, our sermon text for this morning is even more powerful picture of God's love.

Hosea is one of the Minor Prophets. That doesn't mean that his prophecy is any less important, it just means that his book is not as long as the Major Prophets like Jeremiah or Isaiah.

The whole life of Hosea became a living picture. It was a living representation of God's faithfulness even though Israel was not faithful.

The LORD commanded Hosea to find himself an adulterous wife, a wife who had not been faithful in the past, and would not be faithful in the future. Hosea took Gomer as his wife and it seems for awhile that she was faithful to him, even bearing him children.

Even the names of Hosea's children became part of God's declaration of Israel's unfaithfulness. The first child was named Jezreel because God will judge the house of Jehu for the massacre at Jezreel. The second child was named Lo Ruhamah which means I will not show love to the house of Israel. The final child was named Lo Ammi which means you are not my people and I am not your God.

After awhile, Gomer began to be unfaithful to Hosea. She committed adultery possibly more than once. Through her adultery, Gomer left Hosea and hit rough times becoming a slave.

What would we do with someone who had been unfaithful to us over and over again? As we discussed before, it would be very difficult for us to forgive someone who had been unfaithful like this.

This was the living picture of love that God had for the Israelite people. God wanted to show them love. He wanted to be faithful to them, but they were unfaithful to him. Instead of following him in faith, they chose spiritual adultery, running after the false gods and the many things of the world. They turned their backs on the faithful love of their God.

But God is faithful. In his living picture, God commands Hosea to go to Gomer, forgive her, love her once again, and be a faithful husband to her.

We are not the Israelites who have turned our backs on God in unbelief, yet we do still rebel against God in our own way. We act like that lost sheep in Jesus' parable and wander away from the love of our God into some sort of dangerous valley of sin. We may not even realize that we have wandered so far from God. Our walk away from God was so slow and gradual. It was just this little tuft of sin here, this little patch of sin over there. It was this little unrepentant thought that led to another step into another sin.

When we find that we have wandered away, when we find that we have been unfaithful. We might begin to think that God doesn't love us. We might think that God is angry with us. He is allowing us to sit in our sin and misery to punish us for what we have done wrong. Even these thoughts pull us further away from God.

Even though we are unfaithful to God when we sin against him, God is always faithful to us. We see this in his faithful love and mercy. The Israelites deserved to be punished by God for so quickly returning to their idols. They deserved to have God's wrath burn against them. But God gave them something that they didn't deserve. God relented of his anger and did not destroy them. God was patient with them, not wanting any of them to perish. He gave them time to repent of their sin. He continued to watch over them and bless them as richly as he had done before.

God also showed his mercy to Paul by giving him something he didn't deserve. He did not send a lightning bolt from heaven to end him for his persecution and murder. Instead, Jesus forgave Paul his sins and used him to lead many more to the waiting arms of a loving Savior.

We as unfaithful people do not deserve a Savior who is willing to take us back when we fall into sin and are unfaithful. As wandering sheep, we do not deserve a Savior who drops everything to come and look for us to call us back to himself. But that is what we have.

Long before we ever stood on this earth, our Savior Jesus was showing his eternal mercy and love. He was showing his eternal faithfulness to an unfaithful world. As he hung on the cross paying the price for sin, the love of God for sinful people like you and me was seen. Jesus' words from the cross, "It is finished" are really our God calling out, "I love you and have forgiven you."

While it is hard for us to forgive someone who has been unfaithful to us, our loving God is faithful, he is forgiving, even when we are unfaithful. May we thank and praise Jesus that he has forgiven us our many sins of unfaithfulness even though we don't deserve it.