

Calvary United Methodist Church
July 28, 2019

NOT MY PEOPLE
Rev. R. Jeffrey Fisher

Children's Message:

Hosea 1:9

I invite our children to come forth at this time for the children's message, if there are children who would like to come forward. Good morning. Good to have you all here this morning. You are all friends. That is the way to be! I am glad you are all friends.

Today I want to talk with you about a wonderful love story. Actually it is a multiple love story because God loves us and so was this story about this man named Hosea and Gomer. And I want us to first know about God's love. I want everyone to repeat this several times all day long of your life: God loves me. Can you say that? Can you say that? God loves me. It is important for us to know that because sometimes it feels like there are struggles. When you go to school and things aren't going well or sometimes if you get in trouble at home or with each other if you are in your home and things like that. We need to know that God always loves us.

This story is about someone who had a broken heart. Have you ever had a broken heart? Nope? You are a very sure guy today and I like to have that certainty. Well, you know what? There are things that break our heart. Sometimes it is things that go on like we work really hard to get on a sports team and we don't get the position we want. Or we try an instrument and we can't play it or we try to run with friends and we can't keep up. And sometimes it gets more difficult in relationships like with moms and dads sometimes you disappoint them and they disappoint you. You hope to do something and they say you can't do it and it's like you just ache inside.

And all of us know that at some time or another people disappoint us. You think you are going to go to a park today and then it rains and you can't go or you wanted to go visit your friends and the family is busy and you can't go. You've all experienced that probably, right? For some people that becomes heartache because we're not able to do the things we once were able to do.

God has heartache too because...what's it like when you want to love your friend and they won't love you back, they won't play with you and they won't do things with you. It hurts, doesn't it? So, God looks at us and says: I've given you everything you have: a beautiful planet called earth. I give you the air you breathe and the plants and vegetables and things that we eat. I give you a home and I give you shelter and you forget to talk to me and say thank you. And it sort of hurts God from time to time.

Well, He was trying to give a message to a whole group of people, a nation like America that

was called Israel. And He said: I'm going to us a man named Hosea and I'm going to show this man Hosea and his girlfriend, soon to be wife was named Gomer. He wanted them to learn about faithfulness and how it's heartbreaking when things aren't faithful. And in the process of that sometimes we don't know what faithfulness always is but it's being honest and loyal and truthful to people we love. That's just a start of being faithful and God thought He had been a very good god to the people of Israel, like He thinks He's a very good god to most of us of the world. And He says: I don't know how they can forget that.

And what happens when we forget that is we forget our loyalty. Now, most of you have loyalty to a lot of things like your moms and dads and grandparents and families and things you love, right? And when you get to school do you ever hear of things called team spirit? What school do you go to? (Child speaks.) Okay, you go to Infinity Charter. Do you think they have a mascot? (Yes.) Do you know what it is? But most schools have mascots, don't they? And most of us have cheerleading squads and sports teams and bands and choruses and so many activities and when everybody gets together we support one another. That's what God wanted. He wanted faithfulness, that if we are in that school, we are going to support it and if we are going to believe in God we're all going to support God.

For instance, faithfulness: when we train our pets, like some of you have probably seen pets that are very well trained, haven't you? You say stop, they stop. If you ask them to shake your hand, they might shake your hand and listen. Well, that's called faithfulness, but it is also obedience that it's things that are taught.

And God had hopes at some point that we learn to be not only faithful and truthful and all those things, but also to be obedient to God. And yet when we aren't there is pain. I can only imagine what thoughts this little girl might have in this photo. She might think: Jeech, I wanted to go to a picnic and it's raining, or Jeech, my friends said they would call me to go swimming today and they didn't call, and it hurts, doesn't it? Right. If we have plans and they don't come through it just hurts.

In the midst of all that we don't like broken promises. Does anyone here like broken promises? No. When we say I love you, I expect to love you. Your parents are there to love you. Our God is here to love you. Our friends are here to love you, but in reality, we are human and God calls the word sin, but we hurt one another from time to time because we break promises and that breaks not only our heart, but it breaks God's heart because God wants us to keep our promises and the promises to God is, do you remember that little scripture? To love God with our heart, soul and mind and who else are we supposed to love? Our neighbor. Those are pretty easy things sometimes, right? Sometimes it is not always easy to love our neighbors and everyone around us.

But God doesn't give us a lot of rules to live by and when we don't do those things God says: Why are you breaking these promises? It really hurts me. Because Jesus came to teach us that when we break promises there are ways we can get right with God. And one is to say:

Will you forgive me? Have you ever said that word? It is sort of the word, can you say what that is? I am sorry. Those are big words in relationships with your brothers and sisters and parents and grandparents and friends and neighbors, but they are even bigger words with God because when I say I'm sorry to God, I'm saying: God, I am going to try to do better. Could we all say that? God, I'm going to try to do better. Because quite frankly, all of us every day could say that to God. I start every day: Lord, help me be what you want me to be today, not what I want to be. But help me be what you would have me be today that I could be what it was.

This man Hosea and his wife Gomer, they had some problems and there was a promise broken and he went and she was hurt and he was hurt and he brought her back home that they might love and care for one another and be the family they ought to be. In the midst of that they had some children and the one was Lo-Ammi, which meant not my people. Well, when people give names to people they have special meaning. Do you know why your parents gave you your names? My first name, which isn't used a lot, was named after my grandfather. Some people name it because of something wonderful in our life like Joy or Faith or Peace. Whatever your name is, it was probably very special to your parents. You should ask them: Why did you name me the name I have?

He named him this because God said He was frustrated that these people weren't following him. Have your parents ever said that's not my child to you? My mom and dad would laughingly say that if I can come home and would really be dirty and covered with mud. Did that ever happen to you? Whose kid is the? They would sort of laugh because I didn't look like the same little boy. Well, God did that because God was hurt about the unfaithfulness, breaking of promises. He said: I want you to know, He was speaking to this nation of Israel, a whole group of people saying, you forgot me! I am the God who feeds you and gives you shelter and I'm the God who gives you eternal life and gives you love all the time and you forgot that. And so He sent Jesus to teach us that we ought to love, we ought to forgive, we ought to be faithful.

So, the lesson I want you to remember today from this couple named Hosea and Gomer is to remember it teaches us to keep our promises to be faithful to God.

So, I thank you for coming up today. I pray you will be faithful to your friends and your family this week and have a great week until we see you again. Thanks for coming up.

OLD TESTAMENT LESSON:

It's always amazing to me how things come together in the message. This entire message based on the scripture from Hosea is the story of God seeking, longing, yearning for a relationship with us. I think of Psalm 42, which I often share at funerals, it is one of my favorites: As a deer longs for flowing streams so my soul searches for You, O God. I long to be made whole.

Hosea was given this word of God because people had walked away. Folks, we have walked a long way from home and not only should God yearn for us, but we ought to have a yearning in our hearts, we ought to have a desire that from the time we wake in the morning till we lay our head at night we desire God with our entire being.

Message:

Hosea 1:2-10

When I think of this story, Not My People, I think of how difficult it is to hear those kind of words. This is a love story where God is using these two individuals to tell a nation to turn to God. He's inviting them to come home.

There are a lot of stories about homecoming in the Bible. You've heard about the Prodigal Son, we've heard of so many of those others, the Lost Coin, the Lost Sheep. Folks, we are lost. We live in a time and age where there are so many things out there that we tend to go away from God and go on our own way like the prodigals that we tend to be.

When I was a child we loved to play games and one of mine, with all the spare lumber around, we liked to make stilts and sometimes we just did it in the woods with an old stick with a V in it or a Y in it. That one hurt a little more. But other times when we would go to picnics we would dress up and one of my favorite ones was some of our family reunions were near little streams or brooks and where there are streams and brooks there is water and kids will always find water. In your water you often find mud and you come back and it's time to eat and they say: Let's go eat. Did you ever do that? And the parents look at you as you are smiling and say: Whose child is this? Right? You hear these words: Not mine! Not mine.

Now, that's really a comical things when we say that to our little children. It's not comical when it is God telling a whole nation: You are not my people. It's not comical because in my day and life I have seen many parents, I remember through the AIDS epidemic children not welcome home anymore. I remember children and adults finding our news that they were getting married to someone the parents didn't like and: you're not welcome anymore. Interracial marriages, whatever kind of marriages. I remember times that families just kick other people out and this is the result that I get when I listen to the stories: I hurt. I hurt for those who have been hurt because this is our God. Our God is saying: come on home...you are welcome here no matter who else rejects you, come on home. I am your loving God and yet I love even though you break my heart.

You know we've broken hearts. I know I have and I know you have. And I know sometimes I break God's heart when I forget who I am and where I am and whose I am more than anything.

This past week I took a week of vacation to join a mission team from Nancy Flint, who works in our church in finance, to join her church and about 50 folks in Maine, my first trip there. I go on these missions because it reminds me why not I'm a pastor, why I want to follow Christ. Worked on a home with an older couple who had a very small home, I doubt it was 700 square feet. It's the size of some of our living rooms anymore. The man reminded us several times during the week he never learned how to read or right because his family was large and they never had money and they were too rural, and yet he survived; he was thankful. The second home we went to, it's a young woman, I would say in her late 40s. She lost her husband in Afghanistan, has one son that lives out of the area and a ninth grade boy who I love to stand next to. He's 6 foot 5 and big. I felt like a little guy. They live in a rural community. No car, mom can't drive anymore, they can't get out. He says he mostly sleeps in until lunchtime or after and he is dealing with depression, all the things, and he's probably wondering, he's already lost his father, what's going to happen? Mom has a disease that is progressive and is almost into a wheelchair.

What we do, building-wise, we go on mission is the least important. Every day we were there, once we met him, I got there a quarter to eight the second morning, he's sitting on the porch, a boy who is normally in bed until 12:30. He had friends, a young woman in our group talked to him about the scriptures and about having a relationship with God.

I don't know the back stories of most of you don't know of others. We all have a story. If I were in that boy's shoes I'm thinking: my father died in Afghanistan, my mother is sick and she is going to die and I'm in 9th grade. What is my future? I cry inside because we, the church, are not the church when we are not reaching out. This is why God used Hosea to speak to the people of Israel. They forgot who they are.

May I tell you who you are? You are God's precious, precious children. You are the one who says you are joint heirs with Jesus Christ. You are the ones who He said: you have more gifts than I will be able...Jesus said you will do more than I can do. And we have forgotten this. And we are not going to our neighbors and to our friends and to the outcast and to the lonely and to the lost and so God weeps because we have forgotten whose we are.

God says He was pushed to the limits. I did that once in a while with my mom. Did you ever do that? Mom and dad. Couldn't do it too much with dad, someone could get hurt and it would probably be me. But with mom it was: I've had enough. And then when it is really bad, I've had it is gone. It's just: enough! And God got pushed to the point with the people of Israel saying:

I've had enough. I've loved you, I've given you everything you have and you can't love back. Not only love, you have forgotten who I am. You've broken this covenant. I will be your God and you will be my people. I was with Moses. You were for generations in slavery and I led you out with the troops behind you. I gave you new life. I fed you in the desert. I provided everything you've needed and you have forgotten me.

Sometimes we think what old age will be like and we wonder will our children, grandchildren, will neighbors, will friends be there? Could you imagine being forgotten and God who gives us everything says:

You have forgotten me.

And we walk into the shadows saying: but Lord, you want too much.

Our God is a jealous God. God has given us all the good things. When we drove up to New England, it's a long drive. We got into Maine, I saw all these lakes and around the lakes were beautiful homes and on the lakes were beautiful boats and all the jet skis and everything that goes with it. And I could go on to all the stuff in my life that makes me feel good, right? You've got it too, the things you've accumulated and the entertainment things and we have not only our entertainment and sports of all the stuff in the world we love so much and God says:

I don't mind you having it, but how about making me Number One! I'm your God that even enables you to have anything. Don't forget those around you. Not only don't they have homes and shelter and things. They don't have me.

Of all the things the world around us, it's not stuff. Yes, healthcare is good, but God is better. Yes, housing and heating and chilling and all the...yes, but God is greater and bigger. We aren't offering God. We have forgotten the very God who has given us life.

So, he sent this man Hosea and told him about his wife to be, a tramp. It was an unfair day, still is today. In those days in Israel a man could have multiple wives, a woman could have only one husband and yet there was supposed to be faithfulness. I'm not sure how that works. He said: I want you to go and bring her home. For most of us we would say game is over, we are not really good at second chances and God says why? Why do we allow this?

I thought what examples aren't we being faithful with and I thought, in my own mind there are a lot of times when we get in a larger church like this we give our offerings and we expect to come and be fed, but we expect staff to do what these calling. The scripture says something about visiting prisons. I wonder, when was the last time instead of being judgmental, and we all do it, when was the last time you decided maybe I'll start visiting someone, even once a month for one hour, because I can assure you there are people in prisons whose families were hurt, embarrassed and angry and never see them. I've been to quite a few prisons through the years, actually, but not on a regular basis. If you are not visiting there, tell me this: when was the last time you visited someone, not a family member, in a nursing home that maybe wished somebody would care about them when they have nobody? Have you considered doing that or are we just too busy? How about someone sick? How about someone, an immigrant in the neighborhood. How about some young man or woman who doesn't

have someone setting them on a path? You see where I'm going? Hoping that the staff here does it isn't enough. I don't know your calling. I can't tell you what God wants you to do. I can tell you clearly God wants you to do something.

Constantly being faithful with the gifts God has given you, to say daily to you: God, let me be an instrument of your peace. Where is it that you will lead me today? What is it you desire of me? What is it that you would have me do to bring your kingdom? Because if not, we are a weak link.

When they pick out ball teams, I remember, I'm not athletic, don't have an athletic bone in my body and they line up 20 men in my days and, okay, we're picking up the baseball, soccer, basketball...guess who's the last to be picked: the weakest link, the guy who can't run, who can't pitch, who can't do whatever. No one wants the weakest link. Guess what? God is looking around and saying: I don't want any weak links. I count on all of you to bring my kingdom, to find your place. I count you to be the batter up. I count you to be the catcher. I count you to run to whatever it is. I need you to bring the Kingdom of God that we won't have the problems in this world. It's not going to change and if sit back and hope somebody else does it.

He named this children, can you imagine? I don't know what your name means. Disobedience? Lo-Rahamah, not pitied; Lo-Ammi, not my people. Could it get any worse than that? Your parents really shut the door and say: Don't come back. I'm a pastor. I have visited multiple folks in my churches through the years and a couple where the door was slammed with a lot of foul words saying: don't ever set foot on my porch again. It doesn't feel good.

There was a line in Seinfeld. George's parents: Understand we love you like a son, but even as parents we have limits. I want you to know, we say that too often but here's God's response, remember the Prodigal Son? God's a running towards us. God's hands are out. God is saying I don't care what the world does to you, you come on home. You get in there. There will be a meal. There will be a banquet and I am going to put on a coat and I'm going to put on some sandals. You are in God's house. You are welcome here. I love you. I will always love you. My heart might get broken from time to time and I want to draw you here and I would like you to be the loving son and daughter that you ought to be, but I will never stop loving you for I am your God who wants to bring you peace.

There is nothing greater when I see this in any relationship. Longing. You meet someone off a plane or a train or anyplace and you greet them because you have missed them. This is our God to us today.

When I look at the weak link I think of where we are today in this nation. God spoke to Israel but I think God would have a big mouthful to say to America today. Without a doubt one of the most blessed people of the earth and we are so much into this time period. Most of us aren't going far beyond 100 and we are not thinking of eternity. We need to think: how can

we make this land a more holy place for our children and grandchildren and friends and neighbors. How can we be obedient to God? How can we empty the prisons, not fill them? How can we eliminate drug and alcohol abuse? How can we terminate family abuse and spousal abuse? How can we make this place...I have an answer, it's all found in a man named Jesus Christ. But if we are tight lipped Christians and hold all this good news to ourselves, the world will never change and we are the weak link at that point. And we become foolish thinking that somehow miraculously the world is going to change with all our complaints.

If I could ask one thing for this congregation in the next year it would be I'd like to not hear one more negative thing. Let's believe what God can do. Amen? (Amen.) I need a bigger amen. (AMEN!) God is bigger than anything we face and we need to trust in Almighty God and say: Lord, call me. Let that be your prayer every day in the morning and in the night: Lord, what is it that you want from me? For my family? For all of us to do to bring your peace?

And know this: there is not sin that God won't forgive. God says: I'm the God of second and third and how many chances? Seventy times (7) Louder! Seventy times (Seven.) So no matter where we have been or what we have done, God says: You are welcome home. I'm not keeping record. Let's start this day anew. Let's have enough. We have forgotten what we have by the very freedom to have God in our house, in our life, without any objection from the government holding us down. You can go many places in the world where that's not possible.

God says: enough of this! Let's get on board! I have good news. I don't want to have to throw out these names about not being pitied and not being my people. Hear this: I will heal their waywardness and love them freely for my anger has turned away from them.

Our God is too big to have anger. Our God is merciful. Our God offers grace. Our God is a God of faithfulness even in the midst of our unfaithfulness. God says simply: Come home. I love you. I want you. I want you all the time.

God is inviting us to be a part of our life. Invite him into the situation. That young man sat on that porch with that young woman, she was trying to show him not only the way of salvation, but to read God to find hope in what? For a 9th grade 14 year old boy who has lost his father and concerned about losing his mother and what in the world will he do? God says: Let me be a part of your life. I will show you what I will do.

God desires. God's hand is out here. It's never this, there is never a push from God that way. It's always come home ye who are heavy laden and I will give you rest. He tells us things like seek and ye shall find. Knock and the door will be opened to you. See, we only have to come home. Home is a place to be. Though I walk in the midst of trouble, You will revive me.

When I went away this week, I was exhausted to start with because it is almost an 11 hour ride. And I got there and I was exhausted and I'm still stiff and sore from lifting and moving and building, but I want to tell you this, I'm revived when I work with the poor of the world because I see their faith to overcome. I see God in their presence and I see the hope they have. Folks, Hosea's word to you and me and to America and to this world is as powerful now as it was then: God's inviting us, God's welcoming us, God's arms are open, his hands reaching in and saying: whatever you are facing, I'm a bigger God and I can be a part of that.

God wants us to feel the embrace of new life. Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, life is tough and for some it is more difficult than others. Sometimes we forget that those around us all have a story and have a journey. You've called us all to something. I pray, Lord, that we will make that our mantra, that we will repeat it: Lord, use me, make me available. And I pray that you will show us the way for what it is that you would have us do, to be in ministry, to visit, to bring healing, to pray, to feed, to do whatever it is, Lord, that you would have us do to bring your kingdom. Bless each individual, each congregation, each family. Bless us as a nation. Help us come home, we ask in your Holy Name. Amen.