

## Readings and Sermon July 27<sup>th</sup>, 2025

### Hosea 1:2-10

When the Lord first spoke by Hosea, the Lord said to Hosea: “Go, take for yourself a wife of harlotry and children of harlotry, for the land has committed great harlotry, departing from the Lord.” So he went and took Gomer the daughter of Diblaim as a wife. She conceived, and bore him a son. The Lord said to him: “Call his name Jezreel, for in a little while, I will punish the house of Jehu for the blood of Jezreel, and will bring to an end the kingdom of the house of Israel. On that day, I will break the bow of Israel in the Valley of Jezreel.”

Then Gomer conceived again, and bore a daughter. And the Lord said to Hosea: “Call her name Lo-Ruhamah, for I will no longer have mercy upon the house of Israel but will utterly sweep them away. But I will have mercy upon the house of Judah, and will save them by the Lord their God, and will not save them by bow, or by sword, or by battle, or by horses, or by horsemen.” When Gomer had weaned Lo-Ruhamah, she conceived, and bore a son. Then the Lord said: “Call his name Lo-Ammi, for you are not My people, and I am not your God.” Yet the number of the children of Israel will be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured nor numbered. And in the place where it was said to them, “You are not My people,” there it will be said to them, “You are the children of the living God.”

### Luke 11:1-13

He was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples." So he said to them, "When you pray, say: Father, may your name be revered as holy. May your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us. And do not bring us to the time of trial." And he said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, for a friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him.' And he answers from within, 'Do not bother me; the door has already been locked, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.' I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything out of friendship, at least because of his persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs.

"So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. Is there anyone among you who, if your child asked for a fish, would give a snake instead of a fish? Or if the child asked for an egg, would give a scorpion? If you, then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

Today we spend a bit of time with one of the beautiful cornerstones of our faith: the Lord's Prayer. Today, Jesus shows us the simplicity of the conversation he keeps with his Father. This prayer is a constant rhythm of giving and receiving and emotional intimacy that he has with the other members of the Trinity. When I think of that, I picture that holy self-surrender and giving and receiving as a state of mystic bliss that isn't really achievable for most of us. I see the Lord's Prayer, and I think really? This is the conversation between Jesus and God the Father? That's all? I can do this. It's so simple, but when you consider this prayer's role in our faith, it's really quite remarkable. People in care homes with memory issues and dementia remember the Lord's Prayer when they can't remember their own name. There's this constant conversation all the time, throughout time taking the shape of the Lord's Prayer. I read that somewhere in the world, someone is praying the Lord's Prayer every minute.

Some here may know that the folks who chose the readings for every Sunday determined what reading to have from the Hebrew Scriptures so that it would help to amplify the lessons in the Gospel reading. So, how do we approach this remarkable gospel with reference to our stark and painful reading from Hosea? There are several ways. This morning we will see how deep and full God's faithfulness is towards us. We'll consider our response to God's faithfulness that God tells us God's self: it's to ask God for what we need, and to guide us as we navigate what it means to be human in the world. It is to trust that God's response to every prayer is to give us the Holy Spirit. What does that mean for you, to receive the Holy Spirit?

*{But before we talk about God's faithfulness, it's pastorally important to address what Jesus says after he teaches the prayer. Jesus tells his disciples that God always answers prayer, and that it is God's delight to. The first thing that we tend to think about is unanswered prayer. We all have them, prayers that we feel go unanswered. I've been praying for something every morning for weeks that is unlikely to come about in the way I am hoping for. It's getting less and less likely. Even Jesus had unanswered prayers ("take this cup from me"). Prayers that feel like they go unanswered by God is a big, big conversation. In this gospel, Jesus tells his disciples that God's answer to prayer will always be to give the Holy Spirit – God will give God's self – in an answer to prayer. The image of God that Jesus sets up is of God as the most loving, kind parent whose entire focus is the wellbeing of his children}.*

So, what is the connection between the Lord's Prayer and Hosea? We have this reading about God's faithfulness in the gospel counterposed with this reading about Gomer's unfaithfulness. This reading from Hosea is so painful. Gomer is a prostitute, a profession that no one wants to have. If someone is doing sex work, there's painful reasons for that. They either need to eat, are responsible for someone or some people who do, or are in the grip of an addiction, or are being controlled by a pimp. We never hear from Gomer. It sounds like God is saying "go and participate in the abuse of this woman, who will bring hurt upon you, and who should be ashamed of herself for the life she has chosen".

This reading is up there with Lamentations, parts of Genesis and the history books, and the entire book of Judges – stuff you’ll never see in Sunday school curriculums and rarely in bible studies. It’s been used to cause so much hurt and pain and harm over the years, and to legitimate the worst kinds of stigmatization.

There are a few ways that these readings weave together to reveal truths about our relationship with God. The main one, for our purposes this morning, is to keep in mind how a lot of prophetic literature functions as an allegory. This teaching goes right back to the first centuries of Christianity. In this approach, the story of Hosea and Gomer is about God and humanity: God is Hosea and Gomer is humanity. So, this woman who is caught up with a harmful life and who can’t settle into life with Hosea is us. Looking at it this way, it’s easy to see how as humans, we become enslaved to ways of life that we think are going to meet our needs, to fill the void, but they fundamentally don’t. We habitualize ways of living in the world that don’t allow us to develop patience, and trust in God. Convenience and self-reliance take the place of trust.

I wonder if this is truer now than it ever has been, with our access to all kinds of things people never dreamed of in previous times. If there is a choice between having our needs met by something right in front of us rather than upon a dependency on God, we’ll choose the thing right in front of us. It’s important to keep in mind here that I’m not talking about medicines, or access to health care, or opportunities – when we are sick and a course of treatment is offered to us, this is a gift from God. What we are talking about here is whether we lean deeply into faith with all of who we are: our anger, areas of shame, our shadowy bits, our joys and gratitude and areas of strength and we trust that God holds us in it all -- or we reach for whatever thing numbs our fear or needs. Considering Hosea and Gomer’s story as an allegory of the relationship between God and humanity shows how God understands our shadowy bits and that these bits call out a response of love and healing. Rather than pull away, God pursues, and heals, and gives life.

The God of Hosea is the same God Jesus prays to. Jesus reveals the heart of this God who is faithful in all things. And it’s easy to see how this text in Hosea is not meant to pick out Gomer as an unclean woman to be shamed or vilified. This becomes even clearer when we consider how Jesus related to women who were pushed to the edges of society, right? He had a lot of time and bandwidth for women who had been shamed and marginalized or thought to be unclean (the woman at the well, the Syrophoenician woman, the woman with the uncontrollable menstrual bleeding, the list goes on). He held them in a gaze of love and acceptance and wonder. He elevated them as examples of honesty and integrity. He *wanted* to sit down and eat meals with prostitutes, and he did. They were and are his people. When the woman washed his feet with her hair, he called out the disciples when they tried to make her feel ashamed to avoid feeling their own discomfort with her unapologetic display of sexuality. He elevated her as an example of what faith looks like. In Hosea, Israel is compared to a woman who sells her body in exchange for money. Jesus spent time and energy with women who did, reminding them and everyone else of their annealable worth in God’s eyes.

I mentioned last week that our confession is like stepping into a river that is already flowing: we make ourselves available to the grace and mercy of God that flows through time and space. Our Lord's Prayer is the same: Jesus gives us words to respond to what God is already doing in us through the Holy Spirit. So today I invite you, as we pray the Lord's Prayer, to consider how you need God to be present to you. How do you need God's will to be lived out in your life? How do you need it to be on earth as it is in heaven? What kind of daily sustenance do you need, spiritually? How do you long to live in the mercy and wholeness that God offers, and what keeps you from accessing that? What kinds of temptations do you face in your life that are perhaps numbing agents for things inside that are hard to face? How do you want God to protect you from evil? The Lord's Prayer is a prayer for you to conform to the contours of your life and heart, just as it did for Jesus. These are things that God already knows, but wants to be in dialogue with you about, because of God's eternal and abiding love for you. May you abide in that love, today and always. Amen.