

**TRINITY EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH
MINOCQUA, WI
SERMON FOR SEPTEMBER 11-12, 2022**

The Lord said to me, “Go again. Show love to a woman who is loved by another man, a woman who keeps committing adultery. Show love just as the Lord loves the people of Israel, even though they keep turning to other gods and loving the raisin cakes.”

² So I bought her for myself for fifteen pieces of silver and nine bushels of barley. ³ I said to her, “You will stay with me for many days. You must not be promiscuous. You must not be with any other man, and I will also be for you.”

⁴ So the people of Israel will live many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred memorial stones, and without the special vest or family idols. ⁵ Afterward the people of Israel will return and seek the Lord their God and David their king. They will come trembling to the Lord and to his goodness in the latter days.
(Hosea 3:1-5 EHV)

Today’s sermon text takes us into part of God’s Word that is rather unfamiliar – the Minor Prophets, the last 12 books of the Old Testament. Hosea – Malachi. You’ve heard the names before, memorized the order of the books of the Bible when you were younger, even know one of them – Jonah – pretty well. But that’s about it. They’re called minor prophets because they didn’t write nearly as much as the major prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah, but their message is major – because it’s God’s message. Even today, I may be a minor preacher (5’9” tall on a good day), but the message is major – God’s. Today’s prophet is Hosea, who demonstrated **True Love in a World of Counterfeit Love**.

You won’t find this account in any Sunday School curriculum – rated at best PG-13. It’s bizarre. God tells Hosea to marry a woman named Gomer. Not so unusual – many of the prophets were married. But Gomer was a prostitute. Normally, God warned against such careless marriages. Abraham was careful that Isaac his son not marry a Canaanite woman. Isaac and Rebekah’s sons chose wives differently with different results: Esau married an unbelieving wife (caused problems). Jacob did better and fell in love with and married Rachel, a believer. Of course, he married Rachel’s sister too and also had children by their maidservants – another story for another time.

Here, Hosea marries a prostitute with God’s approval (actually, God commanded it) and soon has a child with her. She continues her adultery, however and has two more children that are not Hosea’s. And get this, God named the children – imagine God naming your kids – he gave them bizarre names: a) Jezreel = God’s scatters, b) Lo- ruhamah = not loved, c) Lo-ammi = not my people. (God did change them later...)

God had a point to make with all this. Israel was broken as a nation. Hosea lived in the tragic last days of the northern Kingdom of Israel (730 BC). Within a decade or so, the Assyrians would overrun them and take them into exile never to return. Israel was God’s bride, his chosen people – God was the groom. But Israel had strayed, been unfaithful, followed other gods. And God was the jilted lover, the innocent spouse in this relationship. Hosea was called to be a living, breathing, in-the-flesh object lesson of the broken, dysfunctional relationship between God and Israel.

Imagine a reporter sticking a microphone in Hosea’s face and asking, “Hosea, you married a prostitute, had a child with her, but she continued chasing after other men, had two other children and you’re not the father. How does it feel?” It hurt. It felt like a never-ending punch in the gut. He felt angry, betrayed, perhaps jealous. He knew that the penalty for adultery was death by stoning. Must have at least thought about it. No doubt he wondered why God was putting him through all this.

Hosea experienced firsthand the hurt God felt when his people rejected him. And not just the ancient Israelites. Let’s pull this up to the 21st century. In a sense, when God married us – fallen, sinful mankind – he married into a broken, dysfunctional family. Like Hosea, God was not the one who was dysfunctional and

broken, WE ARE! He has felt all the same feelings that Hosea felt. Betrayal – When we (members of His church, his bride) follow after other gods and return back to deliberate sin, (and Sin, no matter what kind is spiritual adultery, unfaithfulness). Jealousy. Anger. The penalty for our betrayal and unfaithfulness? Death – physical, spiritual and eternal death.

This account could have ended here. Hosea's estranged wife could have remained estranged and lost. Or she could have been brought to judgment for her unfaithfulness, stoned to death. But that's not how it ends.

Imagine that same obnoxious reporter with the ever-present microphone in Hosea's anguished face, "So what are you going to do, Hosea? Divorce her, file charges, watch her die a death by stoning just outside the city gates? We can cover it live – it'll be on Youtube, Facebook Live, streaming live all over the world." Hosea refuses to answer and briskly walks away. Let's follow him.

In our mind's eye, we're just outside a large village somewhere in Israel. There's a throng of men gathered in a loose semicircle – one voice rises above all the others, the voice of an auctioneer. The prize? A slave woman, shamed, disgraced, all but naked. The auctioneer's hoarse voice rings out, as the bidding increases: five shekels, seven.

It's difficult to watch this take place. It's also hard to look away. We're curious as to who this woman might be. Answers come from listening to the crowd. "She's got quite a reputation, had that even before she got married. Right, right, she was married to the preacher, wasn't she?" "This poor creature was married to a preacher?" we ask. "Oh, yeah," comes the reply, I'm told they had three kids. Nobody knows for certain that they were his. But he apparently loved her. She was cared for, provided for, her every need was met. She had a roof over her head, a warm bed to sleep in at night. But she gave it all up. She kept stepping out on him and got in with the wrong people, wound up being owned by someone who profited from her wayward ways. And now look at her – how sad."

The bidding continues. Ten shekels. The auctioneer shouts, anyone willing to give me 11 shekels for . . . for . . . this former beauty! Going once . . . going twice . . . " Suddenly from somewhere in the back of the crowd a voice declares, "I'll give 15 shekels and 9 bushels of barley." The auctioneer's jaw drops. He can't believe what he has just heard. Every head turns to see the man who dared make such an unbelievable bid. It's Hosea. He places 15 shekels into the hands of the seller and promises to deliver the grain the next day.

The slave woman expects rough treatment. She is, after all, a slave. A prostitute. Nothing more than property, really. She feels only shame and hopelessness. Suddenly, she feels a blanket being thrown around her shoulders to cover her nakedness. Strong hands tenderly touch her shoulders. "Gomer," a voice says. "Gomer." She can't remember the last time she heard her voice spoken with such tenderness. She turns to face the voice. Tears fill her eyes as she whispers, "Hosea! Is it really you?" "Yes," says Hosea, embracing her. "I have come to take you back home. You are my wife." The stunned crowd listens and watches in silence as Hosea gently helps her down from the podium. He is heard saying, **"You will stay with me for many days. You must not be promiscuous. You must not be with any other man, and I will also be for you.** (v. 5) I will be your husband again."

Hosea demonstrated the amazing heart and love of God. What Hosea did (as directed by God himself) is a pure example of grace (undeserved love)! No matter how you look at this, it's still a strange story – God tells his prophet to marry a prostitute, knowing that she will still be unfaithful even after they speak their vows. But it stops being strange when we realize that it's nothing less than the story of God's unfathomable love for us. Fact is, we are no different than Hosea's Gomer!

God has never been unfaithful to us. But we have been unfaithful to him! God could rightly separate Himself from us and be divorced from us for all eternity. And we would deserve it completely. God's righteous Law verifies this undisputed fact. Hell is God not only separating himself from us but serving us the Eternal Divorce Papers. But God still intensely LOVES us. And like Hosea He returns to us to win us back, love us back, and buy us back. That is exactly what our intensely jealous, but compassionate God did when He came to this earth to suffer and die. He bought us back from the slavery of sin.

This is true love in a world of counterfeit love. Our world is saturated with counterfeit love. Love is often equated with sex. 90% of all sexual encounters on TV/movies/streaming are between unmarried people. By the time the average American turns 18, he or she has witnessed more than 70,000 images of sexual activity between unmarried people. Acceptance of lifestyles and philosophies opposed to God's Word isn't optional these days. It's demanded. And it's called "Love."

You and I have been many things, but unloved by God is not one of them. Each of us can say with Paul – ***"Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst"*** (1 Tim 1:15) Each of us has heard God say, "I have loved you with an everlasting love. Never will I leave you. Never will I forsake you. I forgive you. I love you unconditionally. I will always be with you." You are the lost sheep for whom the Good Shepherd left all others to find. You are the lost coin whose repentance causes the angels in heaven to throw a party. You and I are the ones to whom Paul writes: ***"I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ – it is a love that surpasses knowledge."*** (Eph 3:17b-19a). It is love that comes to you through Word and Sacrament. It whispers your name – quietly, powerfully, eternally. Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Stephen W. Luchterhand". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name.

Pastor Stephen Luchterhand
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