

Hosea 1:2-10; Luke 11:1-13

Grace to you and peace from God who is, who was, and who is to come. Amen

Hosea is not an easy book to read at all. Not that the topic is difficult to understand. It's not. The topic is actually incredibly easy to grasp. The topic of the book of Hosea is that the Lord God loves the chosen people, the ones whom God has called as God's own people, the people of Judah and Israel. The problem, as Hosea sees it, is that the people in general, and the inhabitants of the northern kingdom of Israel especially, have actively and purposefully turned away from following the Lord. They are pursuing false gods. They are worshiping idols and sacrificing to graven images.

None of which sits well with Hosea, and absolutely not with the Lord. The difficulty with the book of Hosea comes from the language Hosea uses to make his point:

"Go, take for yourself a wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom, for the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the Lord."

Or as the New Living Translation puts it:

"Go and marry a prostitute, so that some of her children will be conceived in prostitution. This will illustrate how Israel has acted like a prostitute by turning against the Lord and worshiping other gods."

Ouch! That language is brutal, nearly misogynistic, bringing up images of wife beaters or women haters. And what's with these names that he gives his children? Jezreel, Lo-ruhamah, and Lo-ammi. Would you name your kids anything like that? The first kid, Jezreel, really doesn't sound bad. Even the Hebrew meaning "God sows" or "God plants" comes across as sounding rather positive until you realize that Jezreel is also the name of the geographical site where several kings of Israel were either beaten or killed by enemy nations. It's kind of like someone from the deep south naming their child Gettysburg.

Lo-ruhamah means "no mercy" or "not loved." It implies God's judgment on the people. The last name, Lo-ammi. Ammi is Hebrew for "my people," but as you might have guessed by now, it is not going to be a positive version. The name means "not my people." You have abandoned me. You are no longer mine.

This is harsh stuff. These are hurtful words. They drive a stake home. They twist the knife around. They rip open the wound and put salt into it. The reason that Hosea is using such cutting, scathing verbiage is not because he wants to hurt the people. Rather, he's using these words to help the people of Israel understand that they have turned their backs on the Lord God. And the Lord God is in pain. The Almighty's heart is broken because they have turned away and Yahweh wants them

to return. "Know you are loved," says Hosea. "Return to the Lord your God. You are forgiven." These strong examples of love is kind of what's also happening in the Gospel reading.

In Luke we start off with a rendition of the prayer we all pray, but then we get a couple of bizarre examples of love. "Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? Or if your child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion?" We as humans, we as parents, are hopefully not going to do such radically harmful things to our children, our own flesh and blood. Hosea, though, I think is saying that's what's happening with the people of Israel and their relationship with God. The people of Israel, by turning their backs on God, are like the ones who are offering that which is unpalatable, that which is poisonous. Not to a child, but they are offering those horrible things to God.

Who would do such a thing, and why would we do such a thing? I know it's really easy for me to stand up here and say, "well I know for a fact that I would never do such an awful, horrible thing." But then I think of the things that I do. If I say that God is important to me, that God is important in my life, I have to ask myself, and then demand of myself an honest answer. If God is so important, as I'm claiming, how much time do I spend each day with God? How many minutes do I spend in prayer; other than the prayer, "God don't let that idiot who just passed me on the right hand side kill himself." And if or when I do pray, am I praying just for myself? Am I praying for things that I want, things that maybe I may need? Am I praying for things that are necessary, or just things that are desired? "You know, Lord, I could really use that new smart phone. It can do all kinds of things. It can download music and videos and its got the internet on it. Lord, it would be a really great tool."

If I say that I don't have any idols that I worship is that true? If I say that God is the most important thing in my life, then I absolutely must be spending much time reading scripture or studying the works of Martin Luther, or reading that cool new commentary series I have on my shelf. Obviously, I'm doing more of that than watching the latest offerings on the Si-F- channel, or reading the newest novel which is going to be a five-book set. Where am I spending more time? With God in prayer or helping others or am I spending more time reading about the latest electronic gadgets or watching television or dreaming about going to Walt Disney World. Can I truly say, can I really mean, that I am better than the people of Israel?

Now I don't know what's going on in your life? I don't know what your concerns are. I don't know what's drawing your attention. I don't need to know. What you are called to do, what all of us are called to do, though, is to examine our lives. To look at what is important and what is not as important as our relationship with God. And when we look at those things we need to then look for the balance. God does indeed want us to take care of ourselves. God encourages us to relax; that's what that whole concept of "and on the seventh day God rested" thing back in Genesis is all about. God doesn't want us to worry about our daily bread, God calls us to forgive others as we ourselves are forgiven. Remember, though, that the Lord our

God is a jealous God. God wants each and every one of us to love, and to serve, and to follow our Lord in everything that we do.

Amen.