



## MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

[www.mzluth.org](http://www.mzluth.org)

September 15, 2013

Pentecost 17

Sermon Text: [Hosea 3:1-5](#)

Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: [Hosea 3:1-5](#)

Psalm of the Day: [Psalm 51a](#)

Second Lesson: [2 Corinthians 2:5-11](#)

Gospel Lesson: [Luke 15:1-10](#)

### **The Believer Grows in Christian Character Christians Love the Lost Like Christ**

In Christ, dear fellow redeemed:

This morning in our Bible study on translation, over in the school commons, we made use of what I thought was kind of a neat exercise to show how different languages use different words and how it's hard to go from one language to another and translate. We came up with a sentence. Then we put it into one of those online translators and translated it into Spanish, Chinese and Russian. Then we put the translated sentence back into the translator and translated it back to English. It's kind of interesting...in some cases it meant the exact opposite of what was originally said. The "he" got changed to "she" or the "she" to "he" and sometimes it made no sense and said the opposite of what was said. The reason that is is because languages are different. The use of language, the sentence structure, the semantics, the use of words is different.

I've used this example before, but it still boggles my mind. English is kind of a lazy language. We have one word for "love," whereas the Greek has three or four. So we end up saying "I love ice cream" and "I love my wife." God help my wife if I love them exactly the same, right? That's just not the way it is. Yet we use that word in the same way. Which one means what? You have to get the different ways from the context.

I suppose that might be why God uses so many pictures in Scripture. He knows these words that he is trying to get us to understand. As they go from one language to the next throughout all of history, some of it's going to be lost. But some of the pictures he uses, like the one that he had Hosea do in what I read to you today...if you read the first few chapters of Hosea, it's just amazing what God had Hosea do. He did it because he wanted the Israelites at that time, and us yet today, to understand what it means that the Lord loves the lost and the depth of his love.

I rejoice in his love. I am amazed at his love. But will I ever fully understand the depth of it? I don't know. Especially when you start considering these pictures he uses in the Book of Hosea. So as we realize God is saying to us, "I want you to love the lost like I do because you are a little Christ, a Christian," his love is an amazing thing, but it's also a humbling thing as we start to consider... that's how God wants me to love other people? Really?

Hosea was a prophet in 8<sup>th</sup> Century BC. He was one of the only I think written prophets that was in the Northern Kingdom, the kingdom of Israel. They had split the Ten Northern Tribes and the Two Southern Tribes that were called the Kingdom of Judah. The Kingdom of Israel in the north, for political reasons, they didn't want their people going down to Jerusalem to worship at the temple of the Lord because Jerusalem was the capital of Judah, the rival kingdom. So they set up golden calves and said, "This is the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt. Go here to worship instead of going to Jerusalem. This is worshiping the Lord. This is really what it is." I don't know if you remember the Exodus. Do you remember how that worked out for the first people that said "This is the Lord your God" and pointed at a golden calf? It didn't work out so well for them. In reality, it didn't work out really well for the Kingdom of Israel either. None of their kings worshiped the Lord as he wanted to be worshiped. They chose their own paths. In fact, many of them started worshiping other gods, Baal. That's the "raisin cakes" that I read to you about. When he said you people love raisin cakes, he wasn't talking about a cereal brand or something you make out of cereal. Raisin cakes were something that was intimately involved with the worship of Baal. So "you love raisin cakes" is a way of saying you love Baal, and God didn't like that.

But he still loved his people. He still loves the lost. So to show the people "I want you to be able to see how much I love you," he said, "Hosea, here is what I want you to do. Not only are you going to tell the people the words I tell you to speak, you are going to do the things I tell you to do so they can see what my love looks like." It said that Hosea took back an adulterous woman. Earlier in the book it was not that she was an adulterer. She was a prostitute. He said, "I want you to go marry a prostitute, someone who is going to prostitute herself with other men. It's going to hurt you. It's going to be painful because it hurts me as God when my people prostitute themselves by chasing after other gods." That is what Hosea then went and did. Her name was Gomer.

Can you imagine the pain he must have felt? He wants to marry her and live with her for the Lord in a way that is good and godly and pleasing and she keeps prostituting herself to make money by going after these other men. Then the Lord gives them children. Their kids had some interesting names. God told them what the names would be to teach the people. "Not my people." "Punishment." And "not love." How would you like to be a kid growing up and every time they called you they said, "Hey Punishment. Come here." How would you like to grow up like that? There had to be a lot of hurt in that household just going through some of those things, don't you think?

If you've ever put together your own bucket list, I doubt being Hosea is on there. Marrying an active prostitute is not on anybody's bucket list, right? That had to be painful. But God wants us to see the kind of pain he feels when his people wander away from him.

In the second chapter, God had the kids chase her out of the house because she was an active prostitute. Then he comes to Hosea and says, "Now I want you to go buy her back." Evidently during that time she had become a slave because the price paid to buy her back was the price of a slave. Fifteen shekels of silver and the amount of

barley he had to give was about the value of 30 shekels of silver, 30 pieces of silver, the price paid for a slave. How would you like to be Hosea and have to come up with that money to go buy back your wife who is a prostitute?

People there had seen Hosea do this. He told them why he was doing it... "Because God said 'You guys chase after false gods. You guys prostitute yourselves with Baals and all these other things that you do and you've turned your back on me. But I still love you even though you prostitute yourself with other gods.'" It's a picture of God's love. He says, "You are going to long for this. There is going to be a time that you will keep to yourselves." But what is going to be left from Israel...the household gods are going to be gone, the ephod, which was a divining tool that the High Priest was supposed to use but evidently they were all using them and doing their own thing that they weren't supposed to be doing, and all these other altars and things were going to be gone. Then the time would come when, in the last days, Israel would return to God. Even those that were left as a remnant in other nations would return to God in the last days and would long for the throne of David.

David wasn't coming back. It's a picture of the Messiah. He's saying, "I'm going to love you and I'm still going to send a Messiah for you even though you've done all these things. Even though you've hurt me in all these ways, I'm still going to love you and carry out all my promises and pay for all your sins. And those of you who believe the message of my prophet, those of you who believe this are going to enjoy blessings beyond imagining." What God is trying to get his people desperately to see is their relationship to him is of eternal importance. It's not a matter of convenience or a matter of making things good because I need God on my side because I'm going through a tough time. He's saying, "You need me at all times or else you are going to have all kinds of these struggles and problems like they had. I love you so desperately. I want you to know it. I want you to have it." That's the whole point of the Book of Hosea. That's the whole point of marrying Gomer.

When we look at it and think about it, I'm amazed that God loves us like that. But I'm also humbled because in reality, you and I are Gomer, aren't we? We might say, "I haven't prostituted myself by chasing after Baal." But what is the god we chase after? How many times this past week have you known what God wants you to do and you did something over here? You did the opposite, right? Either doing what God wants you to do is going to inconvenience you or make your life tough or make it hard, or by doing what he said not to do you thought it was going to be fun and exciting and this and that. What has become the thing that you have feared, loved and trusted more than anything else, the god you have prostituted yourself with instead of the Lord? It's yourself, right? The decisions I make where I say, "Lord, I love me and what I want to do more than I love you." We all do it. We all do it again and again. We are Gomer.

Then we come to worship this morning and stand here and say, "Lord, I'm Gomer." We said that at the start of the service, didn't we? I, a poor miserable sinner. I have done all these things. I have not done in thought, word and action what you want me to do, Lord. Every single week what does our God say to us? "I love you. I forgive you. I

sent Christ to take away those sins. I love you so much that I want you to be close to me and be with me forever. That's the depth of my love. I left heaven and was perfect because you can't be perfect. I died in your place so that you don't have to die eternally in hell." That's what our God did. That's how much he loves us. It thrills me! I hope it thrills you. I hope it thrills you to the tips of your toes when you hear, "I forgive you." That's what our God does to us time and time again even though we chase after other things. It thrills me.

But then God comes and humbles us again, doesn't he? He says to us, "Now remember, as I have loved you, that's how I want you to love other people. I don't want you to just say you love all people and want all people to know Christ. I want you to act on that love like I acted on my love for you. I want you to act like" those people Jesus talked about in this parable. The guy that leaves the 99 behind and goes and actively looks for that one lost sheep, or that woman that lights the lamp and moves all the furniture and looks everywhere and gets all the dust bunnies out because she's looking for that lost coin. She's acting, right? She's desperate to find it. God says, "I want you to love the lost the way I loved you and I so desperately acted to find you. I want you to go and do that for them. I want you to love them that way too."

Really? It's hard enough to love the found at times, isn't it? We know we're on the same team and that we love Jesus and Jesus loves us and we're working toward the same goal, but we still rub each other the wrong way. There are plenty of times when it's hard for us to love each other. Now I'm supposed to go love the lost like God loved me? Sometimes the lost can be downright rude to you, can't they, when you are a Christian? Making fun of you believing in Creation? What kind of nut job are you? I suppose you think the world is flat too?

I remember sitting out in South Shore and having this conversation with a guy I had gotten to know and liked. He has told me flat out he isn't a Christian, but it's obvious that he has talked to Christians a lot. One night we sat and talked for awhile and he was pushing every button he could think of to irritate a Christian. He would go from one thing to the next trying to tell me what an idiot I am. It's not like I'm not used to that. I'm married. I know that. But he kept going from one thing to another, and one thing to another, and one thing to another. Finally I said to him, "Stan, come on. You aren't my enemy. I'm not going to argue with you. You're not my enemy. Satan is. If you want to talk about how much God loves you, I'll tell you that. But I'm not going to sit here and argue with you. You're not my enemy. Satan is." He goes, "Well that's a mighty Christian attitude of you." I don't think he was used to that. He just wanted me to get riled up and fight with him. That's all he wanted to do. Then he didn't know what to do when I didn't.

I'm saying that because usually I would have lost my patience. It's hard to stay patient and love someone when they are just trying to poke, poke, poke you, right? A see you kids in the pews doing it to each other at times. It's hard to sit still when someone is poking and poking and poking you. It's hard for us to do that as Christians and love the lost when they are doing that to us. But God looks us in the eye and says, "Hey! I

loved you this way. Now that I've given you the gift of faith, my Spirit lives in your heart and you say you love me. That means that you are going to want to love like I love. You are going to want to do this."

You and I have no choice whatsoever when it comes to believing in Jesus. He's done it all. He's given us the gift of faith. He's taken away our sins. But after you and I say, "Lord, I believe. I believe. I believe." Now we have some choices. We can either make use of his Word and Sacrament and grow in our faith and grow in our desire and our ability to love the lost and each other, or we can choose not to. That's a choice we get to make.

When you and I see how much our God has forgiven us and the love he has shown to us and he says, "Go and love like I have loved you," it's not a "have to," it's "I want to do this because I want to thank him that he loves me in spite of how often I've been a Gomer to him and chased after other things instead of his will and his love and his peace." We've all tried to find it some place else. It hasn't worked out all that well. And he welcomes us back.

Now he looks us in the eye and says "I want you to be a conduit of my love. I want you to be a source of my love to reach out to others." God doesn't design us to become like a dam that is going to block up all of God's love into this great reservoir of God's love that's only for us. He wants us to be a conduit that shares that love with others and that genuinely does it, genuinely loves, not because we have to, but because that's who we are now as little Christs. It's a hard thing that our God is asking us to do, but as we spend time in Word and Sacrament, he changes us so we want to.

As you live your life this week and every week, you've got a choice... conduit or dam. Conduit or dam. Conduit or dam. Which am I? Amen.