

**Christ Presbyterian Church
Edina, Minnesota
August 11 & 12, 2012
Dan Anderson
Life Verses: I Peter 2:9-10
I Peter 2:9-10**

It was scandalous. He was their spiritual leader. His influence extended beyond the congregation, to the community and the nation. Everyone knew him and everyone knew what he stood for, but now word was out. He had been caught with a prostitute—not just once but on multiple occasions. When confronted, his response seemed to be one of self-justification. Essentially he said, “God told me to do this.” “Actually, I was witnessing.” “You don’t understand, I am trying to make a statement.”

Do you know this man? Do you know the story? This story is tucked away toward the end of the Old Testament. It is the story of Hosea, placed first of the Book of Twelve that we call the Minor Prophets. Hosea was a prophet and while there are many suggestions on how to interpret this story, to me it seems best to take the account at face value. Listen to the opening words from the Book of Hosea.

1 The LORD gave this message to Hosea son of Beeri during the years when Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah were kings of Judah, and Jeroboam son of Jehoash was king of Israel.

After Solomon, the United Kingdom was wracked by internal fighting and disagreement. It fell apart in 922 BC. The ten northern tribes formed their own government and were called Israel with their capital the city of Samaria. The two southern tribes, Judah and Benjamin, remained loyal to the House of David and were centered in Jerusalem. They became known as the Kingdom of Judea. Hosea’s message was primarily delivered to the northern kingdom.

2 When the LORD first began speaking to Israel through Hosea, he said to him, “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.”

Try to imagine for a minute what this must have sounded like to Hosea. He was a devout follower of God who wanted to live an upright life. He sought to serve as an example to the people and as a voice for restoration. “Hosea, go and marry a prostitute and have children with her.” Lord, could you say that again??!!

3 So Hosea married Gomer, the daughter of Diblaim, and she became pregnant and gave Hosea a son. 4 And the LORD said, “Name the child Jezreel, for I am about to punish King

Jehu's dynasty to avenge the murders he committed at Jezreel. In fact, I will bring an end to Israel's independence. ⁵ I will break its military power in the Jezreel Valley."

Jezreel had been a lush and lovely fertile valley, but it was desecrated by murder, mayhem, and massacre. In our own country we have again witnessed murder, mayhem, and massacre, most recently at a Sikh Temple outside of Milwaukee, shortly before that in Aurora, Colorado. Yet who can ever forget Columbine, the first tragic massacre on a high school campus? Columbine is the name for a beautiful wild flower, yet today I wonder, who would name their child Columbine—it speaks of so much tragedy and horror. "And the LORD said, 'Name the child Jezreel'"

⁶ Soon Gomer became pregnant again and gave birth to a daughter. And the LORD said to Hosea, "Name your daughter Lo-ruhamah—'Not Loved'—for I will no longer show love to the people of Israel or forgive them.

⁸ After Gomer had weaned Lo-ruhamah, she again became pregnant and gave birth to a second son. ⁹ And the LORD said, "Name him Lo-ammi—'Not My People'—for Israel is not my people, and I am not their God.

Lo-ruhamah, Not Loved. Lo-ammi, Not My People. What is going on here?! One hundred and fifty years or so after the division of the Nation, Israel had walked away from God. The Nation had cavorted with the enemy, committed treason, been guilty of unfaithfulness, and God was displeased. Like John Edwards, who cheated on his wife while she was battling cancer that eventually took her life, like Benedict Arnold, an American general who defected to the other side, so Israel had cheated on God and danced with the enemy. The people of God had turned from God and entered into a relationship with the religion of Baal. They made idols and sacrificed to them. They bent down and kissed these inanimate objects and attributed their blessings to golden calves. They abused power and exploited the poor. They were so far from God that they took part in temple prostitution and lewd sexual practices. Baal worship also included the sacrifice of little children whose bodies were buried in the foundations of houses or public buildings to placate the wrath of their gods. This is what the people of God had run to!

Into this scene, God called a young man and said, "Hosea, go and marry a prostitute, and have children with her." And the story of Hosea and Gomer becomes a living and divine drama about the faith-**less**-ness of people on one hand and the faithfulness of God on the other. It is a story of God loving people, of God being spurned by people, of God continuing to love people, and of God reaching out in tenderness to win them back. In this first Book of the Minor Prophets, we begin to grasp the depth of God's love for the people of God. What comes next in Hosea, chapter 1, are astounding words.

¹⁰ "Yet the Israelites will be like the sand on the seashore, which cannot be measured or counted. In the place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' they will be called 'children of the living God.' ¹¹ The people of Judah and the people of Israel will come together; they will appoint one leader and will come up out of the land, for great will be the day of Jezreel.

In a great reversal Jezreel becomes a place of beauty, a place of greatness. *Lo-Ammi* or *Not My People* becomes, My People, and *Lo-ruhamah* or *Not Loved* becomes the incredibly loved child of God. But listen, this amazing drama is not done yet. The personal narrative continues in chapter 3.

3 The LORD said to me, “Go, show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another and is an adulteress. Love her as the LORD loves the Israelites, though they turn to other gods and love the sacred raisin cakes.”² So I bought her for fifteen shekels of silver and about a homer and a lethek of barley.

Was that the price for a slave? Or perhaps the price for a has-been hooker? And why should Hosea, who was Gomer’s rightful husband, have to pay to buy her back? And why would he want to? After she had borne and weaned children, had she decided that family life was boring and dull? Was the life of prostitution somehow more glamorous? Had she become addicted to drugs? Why did she leave? And why would he want her again?

In this acted-out prophecy, three words are used for love: *ahaba*, sexual attraction, the excitement of young love, what Hosea and Gomer may have experienced in the beginning; the second word is *rahmin*, a kind of pity or sympathy for the helpless, what Hosea may have felt for Gomer in her state of destitution; the third word is *hesed* or covenant love. *Hesed* is the love of God which sees beyond circumstances and loves unconditionally. In this divine drama we catch a glimpse of *hesed*, the tender love of God for the people of God. It is the truest kind of love, steadfast, loyal, merciful, gentle, forgiving. It is the love of which we sometimes sing,

Oh, how marvelous! Oh, how wonderful!
And my song shall ever be:
Oh, how marvelous! Oh, how wonderful!
Is my Savior’s love for me!

From this Old Testament drama, we jump over to the New Testament and hear the words of 1st Peter 2,

⁹ But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. ¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Peter is not talking about the people of Israel here; he is talking about you and me. With the drama of Hosea and Gomer as background, we are reminded that no matter who we were, no matter what we have done, God is reaching out toward us in love. Listen to this string of descriptive words: chosen, royal, holy, special. From outsider to insider, from orphan to child of God, from runaway to finally home.

In his book *What’s So Amazing About Grace* (pp. 49-51), Philip Yancey tells a story that captures this truth about God. A young girl, we will call her Jenny, grew up on a cherry orchard just north of Traverse City, Michigan. Traverse City is located at the bottom of the Grand Traverse Bay of Lake Michigan. It is the biggest town around, though at 15,000 folks, it is not much of a town, especially if you are young and looking for a bit of excitement. Tourists love Traverse City. They come to enjoy the protected shores of Lake Michigan. They come to enjoy the cherry blossoms in May. Occasionally some cool, tourist kids who were dragged along by their parents would come to Traverse City but mostly for Jenny, there was not much to do, maybe sneak out for a cigarette or a couple of beers. Her parents seemed pretty old-fashioned and strict, they did not approve of her piercings, and Jenny hated her small town life.

One night after a particularly nasty quarrel, Jenny decided to run away. She hopped on the bus and headed for the big city, Motown, Detroit. She did not have any real contacts there but she was pretty sure she could find her way. On her second day in Detroit, she met someone she thought was a fabulous guy, who gave her a great place to live and some of the greatest pills that made her feel oh-so-good. Life seemed better than she could ever have imagined. This man taught her some special things that might please men, and she began to make lots of money for herself and the man she called The Boss until a year or so later when signs of illness began to appear.

In no time at all she was kicked out and back on the streets. She still turned enough tricks to support her habit, but she had no place to call home. As winter swept in, she found herself trying to keep warm in doorways and find a little sleep there.

And then she remembered home—Traverse City in the springtime when all the cherry trees were blossoming. She remembered running through the groves with her dog. “My dog,” she thought, “eats better than I do now.” She decided she would try to go home. After a few phone calls with no answer, she left a message. “Hi, this is Jen. I’m heading home. I am catching a bus. Should be arriving at the station in Traverse City at about midnight. If nobody is there, I will just stay on the bus and continue on to Canada.”

As she rode through the darkness of northern Michigan, hour after hour, stop after stop, she wondered, “Did I make a mistake? What if no one is there? What if they are away on vacation?” Her anxiety built as the bus approached Traverse City.

This is how Yancey concludes his story.

She checks herself in a compact mirror, smoothes her hair, and licks the lipstick off her teeth. She looks at the tobacco stains on her fingertips, and wonders if her parents will notice. If they’re there.

She walks into the terminal not knowing what to expect. Not one of the thousand scenes that have played out in her mind prepare her for what she sees. There, in the concrete-walls-and-plastic-chairs bus terminal in Traverse City, Michigan, stands [her parents and] a group of forty brothers and sisters and great-aunts and uncles and cousins and a grandmother and great-grandmother to boot. They’re all wearing goofy party hats and blowing noise-makers, and taped across the entire wall of the terminal is a computer-generated banner that reads “Welcome home!”

Contrast that with my verse for today from 1st Peter.

⁹ But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. ¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

What do we do with all of this? Let me make two very quick suggestions.

- If you are needing to experience God's love and mercy, **allow God to wrap you in arms of tenderness.** God is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, rich in love, not keeping track of our sins but offering tender forgiveness.
- The second suggestion, for those who are experiencing God's grace, **live in confidence and freedom as children of God.** Let your life declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light.

The nature of oral presentations makes them less precise than written materials; any lack of attribution is unintentional, and we wish to credit all those who have contributed to this sermon. Soli Deo Gloria.