

Love is Faithful.

¹The LORD said to me, “Go, show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another man and is an adulteress. Love her as the LORD loves the Israelites, though they turn to other gods and love the sacred raisin cakes.”

²So I bought her for fifteen shekels of silver and about a homer and a lethek of barley. ³Then I told her, “You are to live with me many days; you must not be a prostitute or be intimate with any man, and I will behave the same way toward you.”

⁴For the Israelites will live many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred stones, without ephod or household gods. ⁵Afterward the Israelites will return and seek the LORD their God and David their king. They will come trembling to the LORD and to his blessings in the last days.

How great is God—beyond our understanding. That is what Elihu said to Job who was wondering why God had let so many bad things happen to him. How true that is. Trying to understand God is like a goldfish trying to understand the world outside his bowl. And God knows that. So, he will use simple things to explain himself. Think of all the parables Jesus spoke. **The kingdom of God is like, ...** and he will use a net or a fruit bearing tree or something to help us understand the kingdom of God.

And God will use pictures to help us understand. Many times God describes himself as a Father and we as his children. He describes himself as a farmer who is sowing seed or pruning his vineyard. He is like a hen who gathers her chicks. We had two wonderful pictures in our gospel reading for today. Jesus is like a shepherd who will leave the 99 sheep in the field to find the one lost sheep. He also describes himself as a woman who lost one coin, but turns the house upside down until she finds it. And think of all those Old Testament laws and sacrifices which pointed to Jesus. What other pictures can you remember from the Bible that help you understand God?

There is one other picture today we want to discuss. It comes from the prophet Hosea and I have to admit, it is an uncomfortable picture. First, let me explain what God is explaining to us before I get into that picture. God says he is faithful. Good, but what exactly does that mean? Well, let this picture tell you.

I. The marriage of Hosea and Gomer.

Hosea had an unusual call from God. God told Hosea to marry an adulterous woman named Gomer. She was probably a prostitute by trade. That is a bit uncomfortable. I mean, parents are hoping for more in a future daughter or son in law than that. But he did marry her. And you know what? They built a life together. They had a home and three children. We know of stories of people with storied backgrounds who were given a second chance.

Sadly, that is not the case here. She was unfaithful to Hosea and continued to have adulterous affairs. Just imagine her sitting in some café or bar, sharing a drink with her lover. The lover looks out the window and sees Hosea coming down the sidewalk. “Let’s hide,” he says. But Gomer just laughs. “Don’t worry,” she says. “I’ll just shed a tear or two for him, make him a nice dinner and everything will be fine. He will not divorce me.” That was the kind of woman she was.

But it got bad for Gomer. She apparently ran off with one of her lovers. We don’t know what happened, but she ended up in the street. It got so bad she sold herself into a form of slavery. Think of those early settlers who came to America. Poor and unable to pay for the trip, they would become indentured servants. This means some other guy would pay for their trip and they had to work for him for something like seven years to pay it off. Gomer was forced to sell herself as a slave or indentured servant.

So, what does God tell Hosea to do? ¹**The LORD said to me, “Go, show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another man 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.** ³**Then I told her, “You are to live with me many days; you must not be a prostitute or be intimate with any man, and I will behave the same way toward you.”** Take her back, God says to Hosea. And he did. He paid the price to free her from her slavery, half in silver and the other half in grain. He gave her a good home, and more than that, he promised be faithful to her the rest of her life.

II. A picture of God and the Israelites.

This is the last we hear of the marriage between Hosea and Gomer. We don’t know what happened to them. We don’t need to because God now uses that picture to describe himself and his Old Testament Israelites. **Love her as the LORD loves the Israelites, though they turn to other gods and love the sacred raisin cakes.** The Lord loved his Israelites. He chose them. The Lord made them into a nation. He freed them from slavery in Egypt, sustained them in the wilderness, parted the Red Sea for them, drove out the Canaanites and gave them the Promised land. He went above and beyond for them and they threw it back into his face. They turned to other gods and loved the sacred raisin cakes. Raisin cakes? What does this have to do with anything? We are not talking about the rock solid fruit cakes we joke about at Christmas. Raisin cakes were a delicacy, like cheesecake or chocolate mousse. Raisin cakes were part of the pagan, idol worship of Baal. Imagine them going to all the time and expense of making raisin cakes for

this idol worship, and loving it. Like Gomer, they were unfaithful to the Lord. They committed spiritual adultery. They prostituted themselves to other gods.

And one day, like Gomer, they will find themselves in slavery. ⁴ **For the Israelites will live many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred stones, without ephod or household gods.** Babylon will come and destroy the temple and drag them off into captivity. They will have no king or prince. They will have no form of worship either to the true God or to their pagan gods. No temple and no more raisin cakes.

Yet God refused to divorce them. ⁵ **Afterward the Israelites will return and seek the LORD their God and David their king. They will come trembling to the LORD and to his blessings in the last days.** He brought them back home to the promised land. Why did he do that? They didn't deserve it as much Gomer did not deserve Hosea's love. He did it because he was faithful. He promised Abraham that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the sky. He promised the seed of the woman, the Messiah, would come from them. And he mentions that Messiah Savior in this text. He said that David would be their king. Impossible. David was dead long ago. But a son of David will come one day to rule over his people for time and for eternity. He was born in Bethlehem, the town of David. His name is Christ the Lord. Did the picture work? Do you understand the Lord's faithfulness better now? Good, because he is faithful to you.

III. A picture of the Lord and us.

Who here found Gomer's actions reprehensible? If that was happening to your son, I am sure, as I would, that the marriage is over. It is hopeless. Well, how do you think the Lord feels when we do the same with him? Have we taken his love and faithfulness for granted? It comes naturally to us since we are sinners by nature. We can come to lay our sins at the foot of the cross for forgiveness. Do we really lay them there, or are we more than happy to pick them up again when we leave? Are we serious when we confess our sins? Shame on us if we want his forgiveness but don't want to give up our sins. Shame on us if we want him as our Father but he better not expect us to be his children. Every day, every week we give him a reason to abandon us.

But he doesn't. Did he reject Israel when they made the golden calf? Did he fire Moses when he struck the rock in anger? Did he abandon David after he committed adultery and murder? God has made his reputation as being a forgiving God. But forgiving doesn't mean tolerating our sins. **They will come trembling to the LORD and to his blessings in the last days,** it says in our text. They didn't just come back. They came back "trembling." He will cut us to pieces with his Word. He will expose our sin for what it is. He will crush us with his law and the eternal punishment we deserve. But he does so only because he is faithful to us. **They will come trembling to the LORD and to his blessings in the last days.** He crushes us so we come back to receive his blessings.

How God forgives us shows how he doesn't take sin lightly. When he sent Jesus to this world as a human, he came to take our place. All of God's hatred of sin came down on his son and it is that son who paid the full price for them. God doesn't tolerate our sinful habits. He doesn't just shrug his shoulders and declare, "Sinners will be sinners." He punished them in Christ. That is why he tells us in Romans that Jesus came to die for the ungodly. And how do we know it worked? He raised Jesus from the dead.

And this faithful God gives us a new life. **"You are to live with me many days; you must not be a prostitute or be intimate with any man, and I will behave the same way toward you."** This was not a condition Hosea placed on Gomer. He didn't say, "I will be faithful to you if you are faithful to me." He said, "Look at what I give you. Don't throw that away for some temporary pleasure. Stay faithful and enjoy it." So our faithful Lord tells us to enjoy this new life and home. Fight temptation. Resist the devil. Don't leave.

Did this picture of Hosea and Gomer help? Do you understand how faithful your Lord is to you? Maybe you are like me. When I commit the same sin for the umpteenth time, I begin to wonder if I finally did it. He must be tired of hearing my confessions. He must be tired of my broken promises. This time he will not listen. Then go back to this picture and realize with great relief and joy that God's love is faithful. Come back to him with trembling and receive his blessings. Amen.