

INI - SDG

4<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Lent

April 3, 2011

Prince of Peace Lutheran Church

Hecla, SD

Text: Hosea 5:15-6:3 ***I will return again to my place, until they acknowledge their guilt and seek my face, and in their distress earnestly seek me. "Come, let us return to the LORD; for he has torn us, that he may heal us; he has struck us down, and he will bind us up. After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him. Let us know; let us press on to know the LORD; his going out is sure as the dawn; he will come to us as the showers, as the spring rains that water the earth."*** (ESV)

Theme: ADVERSITY QUESTIONS: Where did God go? OR Where did we go?

Dear fellow redeemed in Christ Jesus,

In today's terms, the story of the prophet Hosea might be described as scandalous. The prophet Hosea lived at the same time as the prophet Isaiah - a little over 700 years before Christ was born. While Isaiah mainly prophesied to the southern Kingdom of Judah, Hosea mostly prophesied to the northern Kingdom of Israel, but in his book he also has some words for the southern Kingdom of Judah.

The book of Hosea opens by the LORD commanding Hosea to take a wife. Seems harmless enough, right? After all, God invented marriage and said that it was not good for man to be alone. Yet what makes this so peculiar is the type of wife God commanded Hosea to take. The kind of wife that parents would tell their sons avoid. In chapter 1 verse 2 we read, ***"Go, take to yourself a wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom."*** God wanted Hosea to marry an unfaithful wife! An adulteress! Someone who slept around!

Yet God had a purpose in this. He wanted Hosea's relationship with his wife and children - if they even were his children - to be a reflection of the relationship the LORD had with Israel and her people. While Hosea loved and cared for his wife, she cheated on him and was unfaithful to him. So too with the Israelites. Though the LORD loved them, cared for them, promised to protect them, and supplied for all of their needs, they were unfaithful to Him. They practiced spiritual adultery by worshiping other gods. When they were in trouble, when enemy nations were on their doorsteps, threatening to destroy them, rather than going to the LORD their God for help - the same LORD God who had saved them from the Egyptians and delivered them from all the heathen nations living in Canaan - rather than going to that God for deliverance, they instead turned to other heathen nations for protection. Israel was sleeping around with the heathens and now her smaller sister nation, Judah, was beginning to imitate her.

By the time we reach chapter 5 of Hosea, the year is about 735 B.C. Though Israel still exists as a nation with its own king, it is all but owned by the nation of Assyria, the superpower of the day. But Israel is getting tired of paying Assyria's king Tiglath-Pileasar III's heavy tribute. So Israel teams up with the nation of Aram to try and defeat mighty Assyria. They also asked

Judah for help. But when Judah won't help, Israel and the Arameans attack Jerusalem.

Where does Judah's king Ahaz go for help? Not the LORD, but Tiglath-Pileasar and the Assyrian army. In order to get Assyria's help, Judah basically indentures itself to Tiglath-Pileasar. King Ahaz says, **"I am your servant and your son. Come up and save me from the hand of the king of Syria and from the hand of the king of Israel, who rise up against me."** (2 Kings 16:7) Assyria then invades Israel from the north and Judah from the south, carrying out God's judgment against the spiritually adulterous nation of Israel.

Yet, in all this, Judah is not held guiltless either. Not only did Judah seek aid and protection from a heathen nation rather than the LORD God, but she also trampled on her sister nation of Israel. Therefore the LORD was going to pour out His wrath on Judah like a flood. In the verse right before our text the LORD says, **"For I will be like a lion to Ephriam, and like a young lion to the house of Judah. I, even I, will tear and go away; I will carry off, and no one shall rescue."** (Hos 5:14) The LORD was prepared to tear through Judah like a lion would tear through its prey.

And then we come to verse 15. The LORD says **"I will return again to my place."** Like a lion returning to its den after the hunt, the LORD was going to return to His place in heaven and abandon Judah and Israel. By the year 700 B.C. the Assyrian army had defeated the northern Kingdom of Israel and carried her people away never to be seen again. Assyria would turn its attention to Judah. They would tear through Judah in an attempt to destroy them as well.

As all this was going on, all this adversity, many probably wondered, "Where did God go? Why is He not helping us as He helped us in the past? Why is God allowing these bad things to happen to His good people?" Like many people, they may well have blamed God for all the distress and adversity to come upon them. And had God abandoned them? It certainly sounds like that when God says, **"I will return again to my place."** God had left them. But is that really the question they should have been asking? Should have they really be asking where did God go or should they instead have been asking, "Where did we go? Where did we go wrong that God is no longer with us to protect us and help us?"

#### WHERE DID WE GO?

This departure of the LORD from Israel and Judah should have come as no surprise. Countless times the LORD sent His prophets warning Israel and Judah not to continue any longer on their path of spiritual adultery. Again and again He called on them to repent and return to Him. But they would not listen and so the LORD left them to their own devices. God did not depart from Israel and Judah first, Israel and Judah had long ago departed from the LORD and His ways.

But like Hosea who loved his wife, even though she cheated on him, the LORD was ready to take back His adulterous bride, Israel and Judah. **"I will return again to my place, until they acknowledge their guilt and seek my face, and in their distress earnestly seek me."** Now we begin to see WHY the LORD came after them like a lion, tearing at them like prey and then returning to His den. He hoped that in their distress they would repent of their spiritual adultery and earnestly seek Him. Rather than asking, "Where did God go?" God would have them examine themselves and ask, "Where did we go? What sins have we committed that God would cause such distress to come into our lives?"

The prophet Hosea calls out to the people to repent, ***“Come, let us return to the LORD; for he has torn us, that he may heal us; he has struck us down, and he will bind us up.”*** Rather than wondering where God has gone, Hosea urges them to return to the LORD in repentance. Return to Him and His ways. The LORD is merciful, gracious, and longsuffering. He will heal and will bind up the wounds with His forgiving love.

Hosea continues, ***“After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him.”*** Notice the confidence Hosea has in the steadfast love of the LORD! Hosea is certain that the LORD will give them new life. It may involve a couple of days of suffering, but if we repent, if we turn away from our sin and to Him, He will raise us up to life again in Him.

Therefore, Hosea urges again, ***“Let us know; let us press on to know the LORD.”*** Can you hear the urgency in Hosea’s words to those spiritually adulterous people? He urges them to seek to know the LORD. This is done by first finding out what His will is and what is pleasing and displeasing in His sight. The LORD is known by His Word. In His Word He reveals Himself and His will.

Hosea then speaks of the confidence and trust they can have in turning to the LORD in repentance, ***“His going out is as sure as the dawn; he will come to us as the showers, as the spring rains that water the earth.”*** Hosea knows the LORD as his God. He knows the LORD is forever merciful and gracious. If the people humble themselves in repentance, the day of the LORD’s salvation will certainly rise upon them just as certain as the dawn means the sun is rising. He will shower them with His grace just like the fall and spring rains.

We certainly have much to learn from this text, don’t we. When adversity strikes us it may feel that God has left us and isn’t helping us as He promises to in His Word. It may seem that God has torn us, wounded us, and returned to His den. Like the psalmist said in our Psalm for this morning (Psalm 43:2), ***“Why do You cast me off? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?”*** We may be left to question with others, “Why would a loving God allow such a thing to happen to us?”

But is that the question we should really be asking? Should our little minds be trying to comprehend the greatness of God’s wisdom and mind? Or should we instead be asking, “Where did we go?” Rather than trying to examine God’s heart, let us instead learn to first examine our own hearts. Are we guilty of committing spiritual idolatry? Well, as far as I know, none of you have a statue of Baal or an Asherah pole or a golden calf in your house or garage that you bow down to and offer sacrifices to. That is, I don’t think anyone here practices open idolatry like Israel and Judah did. But that doesn’t mean that we haven’t been unfaithful to our God in ways similar to Judah and Israel.

Consider this, when Judah and Israel were under assault from the enemy, where did they go first? Didn’t they first go to the heathen, the unbeliever for help. When we have health problems, where is the FIRST place we go for help? The doctor, right? When we have financial problems, where is the FIRST place we go for help? The bank. When we are having family problems, where is the FIRST place we go for help? When we are having homework problems or school problems, where is the FIRST place we go? Maybe our parents or our teacher. When the weather is looking wretched and we fear what may happen to this year’s planting or this year’s harvest, where is the FIRST place we go? The almanac or an old timer,

who has much experience in farming? Or maybe we look to ourselves first for solutions to these problems.

Now, please understand me clearly - there is nothing wrong with going to a doctor or a bank or your teacher for help. The point of our examination is to see where we are going FIRST for help when adversity strikes. Isn't it true that so often we turn to the world first for help, and then if that doesn't then we wonder where did God go? Why does He seem to be hiding Himself from me?

When adversity strikes, when it seems that the LORD is tearing our world apart, that is the perfect time for us to examine our hearts. Let us acknowledge our guilty before the LORD and earnestly seek His face. Let us confess that we did not seek Him FIRST for all of our needs and the needs of our family. Let us press on to know the LORD. Let us open our Bibles and hear the voice of our God as He makes Himself known to us by the pens of His holy writers. Let us make use of the man God has called to be our spiritual overseer.

As the psalmist wondered in our Psalm why his soul was downcast and in turmoil within him, what did he resolve to do? Ignore it? Fix it himself? No. He tells his soul, ***"Hope in God; For I shall yet praise Him, The help of my countenance and my God."*** (Ps 43:5) While the assaults of his enemies left him with many questions, he rests his hope in God, certain that God will help him.

That is the same thing Hosea says in our text, isn't it. The LORD may allow us to suffer for two or three days, but He will raise us up again as we return to Him in repentance. As sure as the light in the Eastern sky means that the sun is on it's way up, so too God's aid and help is certainly coming. He has torn us, that He may heal us. He has struck us down, and He will bind us up. He will come with His comfort and grace, just like those Palestinian rains each spring and fall.

As for the question, "Where did God go?" there is One who had the right to ask that question. One who never practiced spiritual adultery and never deserved to be abandoned by God. Jesus was never unfaithful to the Father. When the enemy was assaulting His soul in Gethsemane, He went to the Father in prayer and trusted Him to do the right thing.

Yet like a lion and a young lion, God tore into Jesus on the cross and then returned to His den, leaving Him alone on the cross. This God did because on the cross Jesus became each of our sins as the LORD laid on Him the iniquity of us all. God made Jesus to be Judah and Israel's spiritual adultery. God made Jesus to be our sin. And Jesus suffered the wrath of God in our place. God left His Son on the cross and returned to His place, because at that moment Jesus was no longer His beloved Son in whom He was well pleased, but instead the worst sinner in the world.

Though suffering all this adversity, Jesus continued to call God "My God" and "Father." And on the third day God raised Him up to life again. Because Jesus already suffered the punishment of God for our sins, God has healed us and bound our wounds from our great distress of sin. In Jesus, God comes to us with healing in His wings. He waters us with His grace and love.

So, no matter what distress and adversity God has allowed to come into your life, rather than wondering where God may have gone, let us question where we have gone wrong. Rather than examining God's heart, let us examine our own hearts. Let us really repent of real sins. *"In our distress let us earnestly seek Him. Come, let us return to the LORD; let us know; let us press on to know the LORD."* Amen.