

## TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Hosea 1:2-11; Matthew 22:1-14

Gomer, Meet Christ.

For most men, there are few more important things that one can do than find a good wife. So, gentlemen, let me offer you some practical and weighty advice: never marry a woman named Gomer. Now, I apologize to all of you who have married a woman named Gomer, but, all in all, I just don't think its wise.

Hosea means salvation. In the Sanctus and Benedictus, that is, the song we sing before I speak the Words of Institution for the Lord's Supper, we sing hosanna. Hosanna means, "Lord, save us." Hosanna sounds like Hosea for a reason. Hosea means "salvation." Hosea was called to offer salvation to a rebellious people.

Hosea lived during the reign of the last kings of Israel, the Northern Kingdom. While he was preaching in the north, the prophets Isaiah and Micah were preaching in Judah, the Southern Kingdom. This was a hard time for the Old Testament Church in the Northern Kingdom. False prophets abounded, while faithful preaching was hard to find. The kings were hostile to the Faith and openly persecuted it. In times of crisis and even in the most trivial minutia of their life, the people turned, not to Jehovah, God of Israel, but to the gods of the Canaanites and their ilk. Think about it: those who had conquered in the name of the only true God now turned to the gods of the very people whom by the true God's hand they had vanquished, the gods that had been exposed as frauds.

And this was the congregation Hosea was called to serve. He was to shout to deaf ears, to gesture to blind eyes, to appeal to hardened hearts. Needless to say, his was not a call people were lining up to receive. He would be persecuted when he was not ignored, and ignored when he was not avoided.

In verse 2 the LORD does something very odd: He tells Hosea to marry an adulterous woman. Hosea's life, and not only his teaching, was to be a warning to Israel. While the LORD does not condone adultery, He condemns it repeatedly, He does tell Hosea to marry a woman publicly known to be adulterous, to be unfaithful. And Hosea found such a woman, and he did what I've told you gentlemen never to do: he married Gomer.

Why? Why would the LORD tell Hosea to marry an adulterous woman? Because Israel was an adulterous woman, a spiritual prostitute, prostrating herself before any and every foreign god she could find, giving to them what belonged to God alone, lifting up her skirts and exposing her shame to all, as Isaiah and Jeremiah put it, betraying the LORD who had brought her out of Egypt and countless other calamities.

And the adulterous Gomer had children. The LORD told Hosea what to name each, each name a warning to God's people. *"I will put an end to the kingdom of Israel."* *"I will no longer show love to the house of Israel."* These were names no child would want, but they were names Israel desperately needed to hear.

Adulterous, like Gomer, Israel had also given birth to children. Generation after generation became more apostate, more blasphemous, less schooled in the truths of God's Word. That is how it often works—a nasty cycle. A parent's unfaithfulness is multiplied by a child, that is, unless by God's grace they are reborn through the preaching of the gospel. You've seen it in your life and the lives of others. We've seen it in other church bodies and our own. Lukewarmness in spiritual matters gives birth to coldness. Indifference toward God gives birth to enmity.

*"I will no longer show love to the house of Israel that I should at all forgive them,"* the LORD threatens. Israel was dangerously close to the point of no return, to the end of the time of grace, to the hardening of their hearts. God shows mercy to those who confess their sin, but can do nothing for those who refuse to acknowledge or stop their wayward wandering.

I pray you've not married a Gomer, but, man and woman alike, like it or not, you have been Gomer. You too have been unfaithful. All of us, each and every one, least to greatest, have been spiritual adulterers, have prostrated ourselves before what is not God, giving away what belongs to Him alone, turning our backs on our Deliverer. Perhaps at those times we've reassured the LORD that we still fear, love, and trust Him, but that is not what He asks of us. He wants us to fear, love, and trust Him above all things, and He not only wants that, He deserves that and has every right to expect that. Sometimes you've done this knowingly, but many times you've done it without even thinking, without even realizing the magnitude of your thoughts, words, or actions. But adultery is adultery, and we've not only pushed the envelope, we've crossed the line, and there is no excuse for it. We've broken trust and done irreparable harm. We've dissolved the bond that existed between us, rent the relationship asunder. We've been Gomer, and Gomer's nothing to be.

What hope was there for Israel? They had walked far down the path to their destruction, too far, most would say, to turn around and make it to safety in time. And the sad fact of the matter is that Israel, as a whole at least, never did turn around, even as the LORD begged them to do so. They kept walking down and, just as the LORD cautioned, they were destroyed, and not only destroyed, but devastated, dashed to pieces and demolished in the cruelest and harshest possible ways by one of the most bloodthirsty nations ever to exist, a nation that could perhaps make even the most hardened Nazis and Stalinists blush. Babies were cut out of the wombs of their mothers and thrown off city walls, men and

women alike were skinned, disemboweled, and left, often still alive though slowly dying, as food for the rodents that rush to such a trash heap. And God did not do this to them. No, there was no blaming God. They did this to them. They had, by their spiritual adultery, run right into the torturous hands of the Assyrians, whose gods they had chased like all the others.

But Israel's brutal and vicious annihilation was a picnic, a cakewalk compared to what awaits the impenitent sinner in hell. There the sinner will never perish, even as he or she is forever dead, separated from God and any hope of the forgiveness they so often rejected in this life, and their worm will not die and their fire will not be quenched (Mark 9), suffering as eternal as the life the believer enjoys in heaven.

But you're not at the end of that road yet. Hosea still calls out at the close of our text. The fact that Israel didn't turn back doesn't mean that you can't. Listen:

*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 "sons of the living God." The people of Judah and the people of Israel will be reunited, and they will appoint one leader and will come up out of the land, for great will be the day of Jezreel.*

I keep telling you Jesus is everywhere in Scripture, and here He is again. Jesus is here, and He is the Jesus He always has been for those frightened by their sin and its ghastly wages: He is the Jesus with pierced hands at the end of open arms. Run into His arms with the same vigor with which the Israelites ran into the arms of the Assyrians. Run into heaven. Jesus is *the leader to come up out of the land*. He is *the One to make those not God's people God's people*. He is the Savior, who has St. Paul tells the Ephesians (ch. 5), *has given Himself up for you, even as you betrayed Him, made you holy, cleansed you by the washing with water through the Word, so that you are now a radiant Church, without stain or wrinkle, holy and blameless*. God's beloved, be faithful to Him who has been so faithful toward you. Gomer, meet Christ, the Lamb of God, who by His death and resurrection, has taken your sins away. Your crucified but ever-living God called you back into His arms. Let those blessed arms ever guide you. Amen.