

“Of Prophets & Kings, Pre-Exile 2: God is NOT Amused”

A sermon by Pastor Steve Easterday-McPadden for FUMC
Grand Junction, Pentecost Sunday, June 26, 2022

This sermon can be listened to on the FUMCGJ
website: <https://www.fumcgj.org/worship-services>

Scripture Texts:

Hosea 1:1-2 [NLT] and Amos 5:21-22a, 24 [NRSV]

The sermon opens with the playing of Michael
Card's "Song of Gomer" video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QN3kWAcfVs>

OPENING

I'm going to make a broad generalization here.
Sometimes those get me in trouble, but I'm going to do
it anyway! 😊

I'm going to say that most people's exposure to the
book of Hosea is limited to a single-verse quote in the
Gospel of Matthew: "Out of Egypt I have called my
son." And they probably don't even realize it comes
from Hosea, unless they take the trouble to follow the
footnote at Matthew 2:15 indicating that that verse
comes from Hosea 11:1. That's actually a very
problematic quote, but that's for another sermon!

Fewer still are those who know the story of Gomer and
understand that the life of Hosea is actually an object
lesson on idolatry...idolatry as depicted in the broken
marriage of Gomer and Hosea...idolatry depicted as
adultery.

And the language of the book of Hosea is graphic and
visceral in how it describes God's reactions to the
idolatrous behaviors of the people of Israel, behaviors
which are equated with adultery. Those reactions of
God to idolatry are no less gut-wrenching than one
might expect of someone betrayed by a faithless
spouse.

(*An *Excursus* on being authentic before God and each
other, accepting even embracing, our humanity.*)

SERMON THOUGHTS: The Prophet Hosea

(*A quick reminder that we are in the Pre-Exile period
of the Prophets, in the time of the divided Kingdom,
and the two prophets for today are speaking primarily
(though not exclusively) to the northern Kingdom of
Israel.*)

(*Briefly tell of the cycles in the book of Hosea where
God woos back His unfaithful bride, Israel, just as the
Prophet Hosea goes and redeems his unfaithful wife,
Gomer. EMPHASIZE: The problem is idolatry, both
ritualistic AND relational.*)

(*Charges against Israel that we would do well to pay
attention to – Hosea 4:1-3 [NLT]

¹ Hear the word of the LORD, O people of Israel!

The LORD has brought charges against you,
saying:

"There is no faithfulness, no kindness,
no knowledge of God in your land.

² You make vows and break them;
you kill and steal and commit adultery.

There is violence everywhere—

one murder after another.

³ That is why your land is in mourning,
and everyone is wasting away.

These indictments go on and on throughout the book, and they're leveled at the religious leaders – the priests – and the secular leaders, including the royal family – as much as they are at the people themselves.

(*An *Excursus*/illustration on the religious and civic leaders pointing the way to “the path” of righteousness. My illustration of flying with Charlie Osburn at night and needing to land b/c of a failed electrical charging system. The runway lights at the little Valdosta, GA airport first being shut off by the late-shift airport operator, then turned back on, illuminating “the path”, when that person heard us lining up to land. In the same way, we leaders are “charged” with illuminating God’s path for all of His people and so to avoid being a part of idolatry/adulterous ways insofar as God is concerned.*)

The book of Hosea ends with dire predictions of devastating consequences for Israel’s unfaithfulness and sin but also of predictions of healing for the repentant. This message seems consistent throughout the prophetic literature: God is NOT amused with the people’s behavior, and He will not put up with it indefinitely. Punishment will come. But, so will restoration and redemption for the faithful and repentant remnant as promised in Hosea 14.

The closing verse of Hosea – “the moral of the story”, if you will – reminds me of the similar formulation in the book of Revelation centuries later:

⁹ Let those who are wise understand these things.
Let those with discernment listen carefully.
The paths of the LORD are true and right,
and righteous people live by walking in them.
But in those paths, sinners stumble and fall.

Indeed!

MORE SERMON THOUGHTS: The Prophet Amos

If Hosea’s concern is idolatry, the Prophet Amos’ concern is justice, or injustice, depending upon your angle.

Amos was not a “professional prophet”; he was a shepherd, what we would call today a “layperson” whom God called to warn the ruling king of the northern Kingdom of Israel, Jeroboam II, of the end of his family’s dynasty and the end of his kingdom if he didn’t bring to an end the harsh exploitation and unjust treatment of the poor.

One of the vivid images of the coming desolation was that of famine, but not of bread or water – a famine for hearing the words of the LORD. This has been part of our call to worship for the past couple of weeks – recalling these words from the Prophet Amos.

By far the most gripping of Amos’ words to me are those that were read earlier. God is NOT amused here!

²¹ “I hate all your show and pretense—

the hypocrisy of your religious festivals and solemn assemblies.

²² I will not accept your burnt offerings and grain offerings.

I won't even notice all your choice peace offerings.

²³ Away with your noisy hymns of praise!

I will not listen to the music of your harps.

²⁴ Instead, let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

Amos 5:21-23 [NLT]; 5:24 [NRSV]

The book of Amos ends like Hosea with a promise of restoration following the desolation the prophet warned about. God would restore the fallen kingdom of David, bringing the exiles back from distant lands, those who desired to live according to the ways of this righteous God who cares more about justice and humility than about false piety and pride.

CONCLUSION – Key Point to the Sermon: the Gospel

I want to emphasize in these pre-exile prophets the longsuffering heart of God for His people. Too often, God in the Old Testament is depicted only as a wrathful, angry God, but that isn't accurate. As I said last week, the prophets seek to speak for God's emphasis on the second of the two great commandments: loving one's neighbor as one loves oneself. That's all about justice – and you see it here in Amos.

God knows worship is important; God knows loving Him with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength is

important. But without the concern for justice, we could end up hearing the same thing the Prophet Amos proclaimed to the Israelites:

²¹ “I hate all your show and pretense—

the hypocrisy of your religious festivals and solemn assemblies.

²³ Away with your noisy hymns of praise!

I will not listen to the music of your harps.

²⁴ Instead, let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

Amos 5:21, 23 [NLT]; 5:24 [NRSV]

Transition/Close:

9 AM – Debbie Beth's prayer

11 AM – Joe Henry's song (“Let Justice Roll Like a River” by Marty Haugen)