

Overview: God desires mercy, not sacrifice. We practice God-pleasing mercy only when we see our own lost condition and rejoice that the Son of God has condescended to suffer all for our salvation.

Suggested Service is Service of the Word (CW p. 38).

Suggested Hymns:

- 580 “Every Morning Mercies New”
- 385 “Chief of Sinners Though I Be”
- 377 “Dear Christians, One and All, Rejoice”
- 460 “How Can I Thank You, Lord”

Prayer of the Day: O God, the strength of all who trust in you, mercifully hear our prayers. Be gracious to us in our weakness and give us strength to keep your commandments in all we say and do; through Jesus Christ, your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

First Lesson: Hosea 5:15—6:6 When God’s people no longer listen to him, he gives them their way and leaves them floundering in their own hopelessness until they repent. Even then, God does not seek the sacrifice of a quick, but eloquent, “Forgive us, Lord.” Nor is he satisfied with love that disappears like the morning dew. God wants that loyal love that keeps him at the center of our lives at all times and in all places.

Psalm is Psalm 119c (CW p. 111) God’s law includes both his commands and his gracious promises. Those who rejoice in his salvation find God’s Word to be sweet refreshment. It gives life, fellowship, insight, protection and guidance on our pilgrimage.

Second Lesson: Romans 4:18-25 Faith in God’s promises is the golden thread that links believers of all ages to our Savior-God. Though Abraham was too old to sire a son, he believed God could do everything he promised. In the same way, we believe that God has kept his word and done what is humanly impossible: he raised our Lord Jesus from the dead. Therefore we are justified by faith.

Verse of the Day: Alleluia. God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Alleluia. (II Corinthians 5:19)

Gospel: Matthew 9:9-13 Jesus’ mission was to save sinners. In mercy, the holy Son of God associated with sinners—even ate with the notorious ones—to call them to his kingdom. This scandalized the Pharisees who guarded themselves from any association with those whom they considered hopelessly lost. Jesus warns us that the inability to rejoice in his mercy to the lost stems from the proud assumption that we are not in need of Jesus’ mercy.

Prayer: CW p. 127 or p. 42. Lord’s Prayer: CW p. 43.

MY DEAR CHRISTIAN FRIENDS,

Like the prophet Jeremiah, Hosea was given the difficult task of preaching repentance to the northern tribes of Israel. God was soon going to lead his people into exile because of their sin and rebellion against God. God's instructions to Hosea included instructions for his marriage and family. Hosea was to marry Gomer, an adulterous woman. God's reason as stated in Hosea 1:2 was: *"the land is guilty of the vilest adultery in departing from the Lord."*

Hosea and Gomer had three children, although it appears that none were Hosea's. The Lord himself named the three children. Jezreel, the oldest son, was so named because this is where God would break Israel's bow. Lo-Ruhamah, a daughter, whose name meant "she is not loved." Her name signified that God was going to withdraw his love and blessings from his people. The third child, a son, was named Lo-Ammi, which meant "not my people."

Hosea was instructed by God to love and to be faithful to his adulterous wife and to accept her children of adultery as his own. In this way, Hosea would understand how God had been faithful to his adulterous people. Hosea's life of faithfulness with an unfaithful wife would picture how God had been faithful to an unfaithful people.

In our text, Hosea reveals how God would withhold his love and his blessings in order to awaken his people to their unfaithfulness. It was God's plan that through the preaching of his prophets and through the coming exile, God's people would see their sinful and rebellious ways; would have a change of heart toward God; would plead for God's mercy and would return to him. God's plan was that his people would see that their blessings and their hope for the future rested in God. God stood ready to bless his people, but he detested their sin. They had turned to their own selfish motives and had turned to other gods. The Lord was calling them back to God through the prophet Hosea.

Hosea's message still rings true today. We who find it so easy to turn away from God, to forget his blessings, to put our things and our pleasures first and above God in life are being called back to the Lord by the prophet Hosea. Hosea's message to each of us is REPENT AND RETURN TO THE LORD. I. The Lord detests sin. II. The Lord desires to bless.

To say that the Israelites took their sin against the Lord lightly would be an understatement. Despite the repeated warnings from the prophets, they continued to turn away from the only true God and they continued to run after false gods and idols. They continued to live as they pleased, without regard for the Lord and his Word and his ways. They had become very comfortable living in their adulterous ways. As often as they had been warned of their sin and warned of the consequences, so often they returned to their sinful ways.

The Lord had had enough. The Almighty God was not going to put up with such rebellion any longer. God was going to withdraw his love and his blessings. God was going to allow the Israelites to be

conquered and carried off into captivity. He says: *"I will go back to my place until they admit their guilt. And they will seek my face; in their misery they will earnestly seek me."* God puts the ball in their court. The people needed to repent.

The next words in our text appear to be ones of repentance. *"Come; let us return to the Lord. He has torn us to pieces but he will heal us; he has injured us but he will bind up our wounds."* Let us acknowledge the Lord. He will come like the spring rains that water the earth. It is not clear who speaks these words; whether it is the people or whether it is Hosea making an appeal on behalf of the people, as many prophets have often done.

While the words sound good, even alluding to the Lord's faithfulness, the Lord's further description shows that genuine repentance was not there. The Lord asks, *"What can I do with you, Ephraim? What can I do with you, Judah? Your love is like the morning mist, like the early dew that disappears."* Their devotion to the Lord and their adherence to the Lord were short lived. Their good intentions often became just that, good intentions. Their love for the Lord was as fleeting as the morning mist and the early dew that appears on the grass. The need was still there to repent and return to the Lord for the Lord detested their sin.

In today's world, we tend to downplay sin and we tend to excuse sin. We have lost a sense of personal accountability before God. We excuse all manner of sins by claiming not to be responsible for our actions. We tend to confuse the issue of sin by calling sin by other names like a mistake, or a problem, or a disease of our society.

Compounding the problem is that those who should be pointing out sin are afraid to. Parents are afraid to discipline their children, schools are afraid to discipline their students, the government would rather add more laws than enforce the ones we already have, and churches are afraid to discipline their members.

Then we start painting a different picture of God. Instead of a holy and righteous God who detests sin we picture a God who winks at sin and would never withhold his blessings. We like to have this image in our minds of a God who may indeed be disturbed at the sins of others; but certainly not mine; because I have good excuses for all my sins. Don't you??? Or we take our God who demands to be first in our lives and we say, he is first, right after me and right after what I want.

My friends, the answer to what this world is coming to is right here in our text. It is sin against God and God would have every right to write the last chapter of history. We do have good intentions of being faithful to God, but so often we are like the morning mist or the dew on the grass. Our good intentions of putting God first dry up as quickly as the morning dew.

We all too often underestimate the faith stopping, soul destroying, the peace robbing, and the life ending effects of our sin. You and I are called to repent and return to the Lord. Our sins have angered a holy and righteous God. Our pretended faithfulness is bringing only the wrath of God. Our selfishness and our "me first" attitude has turned God away. How long will God be patient with any one of us?

Only God knows. God calls each one of us to our knees for our adulterous behavior. Our God calls you and me to repent, because our God detests our sin.

There is yet another reason to repent and return to God. God desires to bless us. God desires that his people would enjoy all the blessings he has in store for them in this life and for eternal life. God is faithful and God will keep his promises. There is no one who wants what is best for you or me more than our loving and gracious God.

Our text shows the love of God for his people. God will heal us and God will bind up our wounds. God will restore us to a right relationship with him. As surely as the sun rises and as surely as the spring rains water the earth; God is ready and willing and able to bless our lives of faith and to bring us safely through this world to eternal life in heaven. God desires to bless his people.

It is the Apostle Paul who said in Romans as he struggled with sin and evil: *“What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God – through Jesus Christ our Lord”* (Romans 7:24). God is the one who will rescue us from our sin. God will forgive, God will grant peace, God will comfort, and God will bless.

God asks each one of us to put God first in our lives. God did not ask that of you or me without having first sent his Son to be your Savior. Jesus put you first as he went to the cross to pay the penalty of death for your sin. Jesus put you first. He put your life ahead of his own life here on earth. Jesus put you first in the hope that you will now, in thanks and praise and love for Jesus, put God first in your life. As you put God first in your life, God stands ready to bless you.

God desires to bless you. He says: *“I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings”* (6:6). The Israelites were not going to gain God’s favor by their feigned sacrifices and burnt offerings. They could not earn God’s love or God’s blessings. They were to seek God’s mercy and simply acknowledge God. They were to see that God’s grace and mercy were gifts of God.

So it also is today. We cannot satisfy God by thinking that we have somehow done our duty and have earned his grace and favor. We cannot set up our own rules of what it is that God expects of us. What God wants is acknowledgment of him. Whatever we do and on whatever day we do it, we do it for the glory of God. We do all things for the glory of God who loves us and desires to bless us. As much as we underestimate the damaging effects of our sin, so also we underestimate our God’s willingness to forgive us and to bless us. May we repent and return to our God, knowing that God detests our sin and trusting that God will bless us. In Jesus’ name—AMEN.