

WELCOME 20th October 2019 – 19 Pentecost '19 C

John 3:27-30 & Hosea 2:14-20

Good morning! Welcome to worship today! Special welcome guests & visitors! It's our privilege & joy to serve you in worship.

What's not to like about a wedding?

Beyond the pageantry or the spectacle there's the bride & the groom and their enormous promises to one another. And it's those promises, those vows that are the hard part. Anything we set our lives on "until death parts us" is just going to test us, stretch us & expose the strengths & especially the weaknesses of our hearts.

How about these vows: "*I will make you my wife forever, showing you righteousness & justice, unfailing love & compassion. I will be faithful to you & make you mine, & you will finally know me as the Lord.*"

That's God's vow...to us...a vow he keeps day after day & because of Christ, not even death can separate us from that promise.

We'll experience & celebrate that together today – as the Father invites us to relate to him as a Bride to a Groom & as the Father renews his vow of love his vow of forgiveness his vow to protect us his vow to preserve us his vow to draw us into his intimate presence & be with us forever.

Let's pray...

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Almighty God, you are our Father. You created us for life with you. Make today that day when you draw us close to you in love, in forgiveness, in restoration and in joy. Draw us deeper into your heart so we know you intimately, trust you completely, & live the fullness & fruitfulness only you can bring. Let the world see your life & love in us, bringing glory & praise to you...through Jesus Christ. Amen

19 PENTECOST '19 C – I CAN RELATE TO THAT: A BRIDE TO A GROOM

FAITH CHAT:

1. "Best" wedding you've ever attended? Besides your own! What made it special?
2. God calls Hosea to love someone hard to love. How does Christ's love for you give you the ability to love someone who seems unlovable?

"Is your fiancée the only person to whom you believe you could be happily married?" That's one of the items on the pre-marriage questionnaire I use when folks come to me to do their wedding. It's one of a couple hundred questions & it generates some good conversation. 99.9% of the time 1/both to-be-marrieds sitting on my sofa will look dreamily into the other's eyes & say "Yes." Good. By the time they get to my sofa, they should've excluded all other options. There should be no 2nd-guesses. I hope they have some sense of the uniqueness of the relationship they're in & the specific way this marriage relationship is superior to any other of their earthly options/choices.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote a wedding sermon for his niece...the 1st time I read it this part knocked me out of my chair: With the 'Yes' that they have said to each other, they have by their free choice given a new direction to their lives; they have cheerfully & confidently defied all the uncertainties & hesitations with which, as they know, a lifelong partnership between two people is faced. By their own free & responsible action they have conquered a new land to live in. He reminds us: we choose our relationships. We exclude some/include others. We decide "this is it" & there are no escape clauses...no ejector switches...no Plan Bs... OTOH

The prophet Hosea was told by God to choose a wife who always had a plan B... always had an escape clause...would repeatedly choose other options other men. Why? Why would God ask his prophet/servant to experience such pain such social & emotional devastation? Why would God tell Hosea "choose for your wife a cheating promiscuous prostitute"? Why would God tell Hosea to voluntarily willingly publically & repeatedly have his heart broken stomped on & left in pieces?

Because that was precisely the experience of the Father in relating to his people. That was what Israel had done to the heart of the Father. That was how humanity treated the Father every day of its existence. One interesting question to ask when reading/studying the Bible is "To whom in this story do I most closely relate?" For the duration of Hosea's life, we ain't Hosea. We are not the hero in this story. We are his wife Gomer. There was no mistaking what Hosea was living in his very home He was living the abject brokenheartedness of the Father who had seen his creation rebel against him – turn its back on his goodness & graceful provision & choose to be god for itself. Hosea was a living breathing sign of the Father's anguish & anger at his people's idolatry.

Hosea writes at a time of great national prosperity in both Nth & Sth Kingdoms. Probably up to/into the destruction of the Nth by Assyria in 722bc. Nothing but 1st world problems. He & Amos were contemporaries & about this time Amos proclaims: *What sorrow awaits you who lounge in luxury in Jerusalem, & you who feel secure in Samaria! You are famous & popular in Israel, & people go to you for help... You push away every thought of coming disaster, but your actions only bring the day of judgment closer. How terrible for you who sprawl on ivory beds & lounge on your couches, eating the meat of tender lambs from the flock & of choice calves fattened in the stall. You sing trivial songs to the sound of the harp & fancy yourselves to be great musicians like David. You drink wine by the bowlful & perfume yourselves with fragrant lotions. You care nothing about the ruin of your nation.*

Living in the lap of luxury God's people were convinced they had the world by the tail & would never turn loose. Absorbed by the trivial & the self-indulgent they forgot the God who had bought them from slavery by his mighty hand & brought them to himself as his prized possession – dearly loved people. They trusted their wealth & their might & their wisdom & devoted themselves to every distraction & adored the gods of this world worshipping at the altar of their own desire...Think about it global trade, individual & national wealth, & no pressing threat to your security. Sound familiar? Stock market goes up. Our homes become filled with things. The well of pleasure open to us seems inexhaustible. In the grip of affluence we tend to forget God. Why think about heaven when we have so much on earth? Our thoughts are not occupied with much beyond the next good thing.

Which is why God sent Hosea to marry Gomer...a lady of the oldest profession who would not be faithful to the covenant of marriage. Into that unfaithfulness came 3 children (Jezreel a place of vengeance, Not-pitied & Not-my-family) Their names were public witness to how God & Hosea felt about that sort of unfaithfulness. But even then, Hosea's heart beat only for his bride. Over & over again he retrieved her according to God's command...& as he does God reveals what he will ultimately do

"For this reason I will fence her in with thornbushes. I will block her path with a wall to make her lose her way." 2:6 "But now I will take back the ripened grain & new wine I generously provided each harvest season. I will take away the wool & linen clothing I

gave her to cover her nakedness. I will strip her naked in public, while all her lovers look on. No one will be able to rescue her from my hands." 2:9-10 Unfaithfulness – rebellion – idolatry – being god-for-self is judged...God describes the natural consequence of his wrath...judgment & slavery...captivity & devastation..."But then I will win her back once again. (I will woo her. I will allure her.) I will lead her into the desert & speak tenderly to her there." – 2:14

Starting w/ this verse is a flood of promises whose elements are highlighted by the words of a marriage vow: "I will." Judgment & slavery captivity & devastation punishment & abandonment are all swept away in a renewal of the tender love of the Father for his wayward sinful people...God will not win us by raw power or thunderous threats...or by more rule & religion...but by love...by mercy...by the tenderness that recognizes our weakness & frailty & seeks not to whip us into conformity but to woo into devotion & obedience...And not just Gomer...not just a nation called Israel...it's you...God's tender love for you & His pursuit of a relationship with you is as startling as it is relentless. Hosea reminds you: you are not beyond the love of God. You are not unlovable. The majesty of God's tender love is that the Father pursues, allures, & woos to win you.

"When that day comes," says the Lord, "you will call me 'my husband' instead of 'my master.' (Baal) O Israel, I will wipe the many names of Baal from your lips, & you will never mention them again. I will says the Father...wipe away every trace of your idolatry your self-devotion your sinfulness your god-for-selfishness...Life in relationship with the Father God always begins with his forgiveness. I will...not a demand for some sign of regret...some word of sorry...(retell lost sheep)

I will...is the Father's sole initiative the Father's vow to grant forgiveness & restoration...cleansing & healing: When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time & died for us sinners...God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. Since our friendship with God was restored by the death of his Son while we were still his enemies, we will certainly be saved through the life of his Son. Now we can rejoice in our wonderful new relationship with God because our Lord Jesus Christ has made us friends of God. – Rom 5:6, 8, 10-11 I will says the Father...wipe away every trace of your idolatry/self-devotion/sinfulness - your god-for-selfishness...Life in relationship w/ the Father God always begins w/ his forgiveness.

On that day I will make a covenant with all the wild animals & the birds of the sky & the animals that scurry along the ground so they will not harm you. I will says the Father...protect & defend you from harm. I will stand b/t you & all that would destroy you. "We can say with confidence, 'The Lord is my helper, so I will have no fear. What can mere mortals do to me?'" – Heb 13:6 My sheep hear My voice, I know them, & they follow Me. I give them eternal life, & they will never perish—ever! No one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all. No one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.- Jn 10:27-29 I will says the Father... protect & defend you from harm. I will stand b/t you & all that would destroy you. Not even death can tear you from the Father's embrace. The grave loses to the Father's tender love & the Son's resurrection triumph.

I will remove all weapons of war from the land, all swords & bows, so you can live unafraid in peace & safety. I will says the Father...be the constant preserving presence in your life. Satisfaction. Contentment. Peace. Joy... Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. – Jn 14:27 A thief comes only to steal, kill & destroy. I have come so that they may have life & have it in abundance. – Jn 10:10 I will says the Father...be the constant preserving presence in your life. Satisfaction. Contentment. Peace. Joy...to the full.

I will make you my wife forever, (I will make you my wife) showing you righteousness & justice, unfailing love & compassion. I will be faithful to you & make you mine, (I will make you my wife) & you will finally know me as the Lord. 3x the Hebrew text repeats the marriage promise...This is a return to the engagement/betrothal...God promises a new beginning – a fresh start – God promises that his new relationship is grounded in a fresh foundation: righteousness, justice, steadfast love, mercy, faithfulness. Our destiny is to live in intimacy with the Father where all things are made right & made new...& we live face-to-face with God - every Gomer among us – every idolatrous failure in faith is forgiven & a new hope is born...

This is the good news...in Christ God comes to woo us tenderly to himself; he promises his presence his protection & preservation satisfaction & joy peace & a new start in love that lasts forever in an intimate relationship far surpassing any earthly pleasure. *Then I saw "a new heaven & a new earth," for the first heaven & the first earth had passed away, & there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, He will dwell with them. They will be his people, & God himself will be with them & be their God. 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."* He who was seated on the throne said, *"I am making everything new!"* – Rev 21:1-5

God is mightily, passionately & whole heartedly into you. The Father woos you tenderly & today renews his vow of love his vow of forgiveness his vow to protect us his vow to preserve us his vow to draw us into his intimate presence & be

with us forever. Today, he gives you again his Son, saying 'Receive my Son as proof of my promise of love and faithfulness.'

Let's pray with that in mind... Father, in your tender love you have claimed us for yourself. In your Son you have driven back sin and death and set us free to love you forever. Fill us with the Spirit of your Son. Let his life fill us to overflow so that all around us see you formed in our lives. Let nothing separate us from your presence through Jesus Christ we pray...Amen.