

Hosea 3:1-5 *The Lord said to me, “Go, show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another man and is an adulteress. Love her as the Lord loves the Israelites, though they turn to other gods and love the sacred raisin cakes.”* ²*So I bought her for fifteen shekels grams of silver and about a homer and a lethek of barley.* ³*Then I told her, “You are to live with me many days; you must not be a prostitute or be intimate with any man, and I will behave the same way toward you.”* ⁴*For the Israelites will live many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred stones, without ephod or household gods.* ⁵*Afterward the Israelites will return and seek the Lord their God and David their king. They will come trembling to the Lord and to his blessings in the last days.*

Dear friends in Christ our Savior,

It doesn't make any sense. Why is a pizza box square when pizza is round and a slice is a triangle? It doesn't make any sense. Why do we call them chicken fingers when chickens don't even have any fingers? It doesn't make sense. Why do we call them a pair of pants when there is only one? It doesn't make any sense. Why do we press harder on the remote when the batteries are dead hoping that it is miraculously going to help? It doesn't make any sense. Why do we talk louder and use weird hand gestures when we are speaking with someone who doesn't speak English well and doesn't understand what we are saying? How is that going to help? It doesn't make any sense.

There are a lot of things that we simply accept on a regular basis that don't make any sense when we step back to analyze them. What God asked of the prophet Hosea didn't make any sense either. In chapter 1 of this prophecy, Hosea tells us that God instructed him to marry Gomer, an adulterous prostitute. He did. But it didn't take too long for Gomer to do what we might expect her to do: run off with another lover. We might expect God to give Hosea the nod to divorce Gomer and be done with her and move on to someone much better for him. So what God instructs of Hosea in our text doesn't make any sense: *Go, show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another man and is an adulteress.* Even worse, the lover whom Gomer had run off with no longer cared for her and had decided to sell her into slavery at the city auction block. Imagine the indignity and injustice of having to pay money to your wife's adulterous lover in order to rescue her from her betrayal to you! That makes no sense to us. It defies our earthly logic.

What we expect in marriage is for a husband and wife to dedicate themselves completely to God first and then to each other alone. The marriage promise includes not only being faithful to one another but reserving their highest affection only for the other. The unique reservation of a husband's affection for his wife and a wife's affection for her husband is the very definition of marriage. A husband's deepest affection is to be for his wife alone and a wife's deepest affection is to be for her husband alone! They are to reserve themselves for each other body and spirit. They are not to seek the attention nor affection of others nor give their attention or affection to another. They are not to share their deepest and most intimate thoughts or moments with anyone other than each other. This is what we expect of a husband and a wife toward each other. This makes sense to us.

It doesn't make any sense for God to ask Hosea to give all of this up and marry an adulterous spouse. Even more so, once she has strayed as any of us could have predicted she would do, it makes less sense for God to ask him to take her back and love her. There is no greater hurt one could bring on a spouse than to betray marital intimacy and give oneself to another person. That this is one of two reasons why God would allow divorce tells us how hurtful and damaging this destruction of trust can be. Not only was it embarrassing for Hosea to accept her back with his full affection, but it was even more humiliating to have to go to the slave block and buy her back from her lover who was now discarding her. It doesn't make any sense why God would ask this of Hosea.

Some may have asked, “Why buy her back? Why not let her get what she deserved?” Others may have assumed he was buying her back so that he could punish her himself. But that wasn't the case either. God tells us why he wanted Hosea to love Gomer and to buy her back and accept her back as his wife and show her his full affection: *Love her as the Lord loves the Israelites, though they turn to other gods and love the sacred raisin cakes.* He wasn't buying her back to punish her but to redeem her. He wasn't seeking revenge against her but wanted to nurse her back to purity. He bought her back because he loved her. He wasn't inviting her back as a roommate who would help herself to his blessings while living on her own terms. He invited her back to love her as his wife.

It makes no sense until we understand God's purpose. Hosea and Gomer's marriage was to serve as an object lesson for the people of Israel. This was a living illustration of God's relationship with and love for the people of Israel. Though he had always been a faithful husband to them, they had committed spiritual adultery against him. Hosea lived during a time when Israel had enjoyed great prosperity. As so often happens during times of prosperity, the people had forgotten about God. Though he had shown to them his deepest affection, they prostituted themselves as adulterous lovers with the gods of the Canaanite people around them. They turned their backs on God's abiding love for them and chased after the immoral practices of the heathen gods. Few things have the power to destroy families and relationships the way adultery does. The same is true with spiritual adultery. It destroys the person's relationship with the almighty God. Yet, even though the people had continually turned their backs on God and rejected the prophets whom God had sent to call them back, he still loved them. As he asked Hosea to love the unlovable Gomer, so God continued to love the unlovable Israel. This account isn't so much about the illogical thing which God asked of Hosea. It is all about the unrelenting love of God for his people. It shows us the depths of God's love. God's love for his people is not just mere sentimentality or affection. His love is a love that makes no earthly sense. There is nothing about God's love which is logical. He deals with his people completely differently than we would. Rather than condemning and throwing them away, God loves them and forgives them. This helps us to see the lengths to which God is willing to go to love his people. He was going to have them go away into exile for a number of years. They would be without the worship in their Temple, without their priests and without a king. But God's deliverance of his people and his rescue of them from exile would lead them to come trembling in awe to seek him and the blessings he promised through David to send his Savior into the world.

Here's the reality of God's love: he doesn't love his people because of what they do. He loves them in spite of what they do. He doesn't love his people because of who they are. He has always loved his people in spite of who they are. This is the mystery

behind God's love. His love doesn't make any sense. He loves the unlovable and shows love to those who are consistently and often rebellious against him.

This makes it a little easier to take a realistic look at this text. God was not only talking about the people of Israel when he accused them of committing spiritual adultery. He was talking about you and me as well. We might look down rather condescendingly on Gomer in our text or speak rather harshly today about someone who would cheat on their spouse. But Gomer not only represented the people of Israel. She represents you and me as well. Through our disgust with foul and fickle Gomer, can we see in some small way how our sin, however small, any and all of our sin, must appear in God's sight? It's hard to see ourselves in Gomer and even harder to admit when we do see it. When God brought us into his family, he pledged to us full and complete devotion as a husband pledges to his wife. In our confession to follow Jesus, we have pledged to continue steadfast in his teaching and endure all things, even death rather than fall away from it. We have pledged to faithfully conform all of our lives—every aspect of them—to the teachings of God, to be faithful in the use of Word and Sacrament and in faith and action remain true to God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—as long as we live. We've pledged to be faithful to God and to follow him in all things until our time on this earth is done.

But how have we done? How often haven't we pursued friendship with the world as our spiritual lover and turned our backs on our faithful God? We've loved and valued the system of this world around us whose values, loves and deeds are wholly at odds with what pleases our creator. We've embraced ungodly speech, allowed jealousy to take hold of us and let selfish ambition rule our hearts to the exclusion of what God wants of us. We give our time, resources, affections and commitments to things that exclude God rather than those things that serve him. We are willing to compromise on the truths of God's word to follow after the world around us. We go after whatever we want, choose not to limit ourselves in anything but rather explore our full potential even if that puts us at direct odds with the God who created us. We put our needs and our aspirations first. We are lured away from God by the temptations of the world and our own lusts and desires which grab hold of us and seek to be gratified.

But do we consider this spiritual adultery when we reject God's way to follow our own? I don't think that we do. Adultery is something bad. We consider our pursuits not that bad in the grand scheme of things. Calling our sin spiritual adultery sounds so over the top and dramatic. Yet this is the exact the way God pictures our sin today—like that of an adulterous spouse. Would you take it easy if you heard about your spouse's infidelity in your marriage? No way! When we put it this way, we understand better how the Lord is when a Christian shares his or her love with the things of this world. We also understand better the reality that to those who hold tightly to these true loves and refuse to give them up why the Lord would divorce them from him. This is what we call hell. This actually makes sense to us. If we had a friend who had been cheated on in this way, we wouldn't be afraid to step in and say, "Friend, you can do better than this! Cast that person away. You deserve better." This we understand—that God would punish those who continually rebel against him and turn their affection from him.

Yet, that isn't the way God has chosen to deal with us. Rather than casting us away as would make sense for an adulterous spouse, God has gone to great lengths to rescue us. He didn't go to the auction block to redeem us. He went instead to Calvary's cross. The price to redeem us was much greater than *fifteen shekels of silver and about a homer and a lethek of barley*. No, the price that he paid was the perfect life and innocent sufferings and death of his own son. He bought us not with gold or silver, but with his holy precious blood. That doesn't make any sense. God punished the righteous for the unrighteous. He punished the innocent for the guilty. He sent his own son to rescue sinful humans. Instead of punishment God chose grace. Instead of justice, God chose mercy. It doesn't make any sense! And thank God for that! Every week we leave God's house vowing to live 100% for him during the next week. Every week we gather in God's house and confess we did just the opposite. Yet every week, God displays his grace, mercy and love when he announces his full and free forgiveness for all of your sins. God's love for you doesn't make any sense. That's ok. It doesn't have to. Just step back and appreciate that love and bask in God's goodness.

What God wants of you now is to go out and love the lost the way that he does. He loved you as unlovable as you are. He wants you to go out and love the unlovable. When people sin against you, don't react in the way that would make sense to us by treating them with what they would deserve or justice would demand. Rather, react to them the way that Jesus does for us. Be willing to forgive and absolve them. Share with them how much God loves them and forgives them in Jesus. There was a pretty powerful example of this very thing this past week. You might be familiar with the story. A jury in Texas sentenced former Dallas police officer Amber Guyger to 10 years in prison for the murder of Botham Jean. Jean was shot as he was watching television and eating ice cream in his own apartment one night. Guyger claimed she mistook him for an intruder after walking into his apartment thinking it was her own. After the sentence was handed down, Jean's younger brother, Brandt, offered Guyger his forgiveness. 'I forgive you, and I know if you go to God and ask him, he will forgive you. I'm speaking for myself, not my family, but I love you just like anyone else,' Brandt Jean told Guyger. He then asked the judge's permission to hug Guyger and the two embraced for about a minute. Even the judge hugged Guyger before sending her to jail. This has drawn some outrage and protests because it doesn't make any sense! Forgiving and showing love to someone who killed your brother needlessly doesn't make sense. Asking for justice. Wishing the killer would rot in hell. Hoping that person never sees the light of day. That makes sense to us. But loving the unlovable? Forgiving the sinner? That doesn't make any sense. God's love never does! He loves us in Jesus and he asks us to go out and love the lost the way that he loves us.

Oh the height of Jesus love, higher than the heav'ns above. Deeper than the depths of sea, lasting as eternity. Love that found me wondrous thought! Found me when I sought him not! What Hosea did for Gomer, God has done for us. What a wondrous thought! He pursued us all the way up Calvary's hill, through the tunnel of an empty tomb, and through the labyrinth ways of life which brought you to this place today. That's how much God loves you. That's how much God wants you to love others. It doesn't make any sense. But God's love never does. Amen.