

Sermon Title: “When Love Won’t Let Go”

Setting: 7th Sunday after Pentecost, Year C

**Grace and peace to you, in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.  
Amen.**

Our scripture reading today may make some of us feel uneasy. Today’s story might seem, at first glance, scandalous, uncomfortable, or even offensive. In the book of Hosea (one of the 12 minor prophets), God says to the prophet Hosea, “Go, marry a prostitute.” Not what you expect God to say. Not what you expect a prophet to do. Yet here it is. In black and white. The Word of the Lord. Why? Why would God ask this of a man of God? Why would God use such a dramatic, painful relationship to make a point? Because the people of Israel had forgotten the very heart of God. They had been unfaithful. They had turned to other gods. They had traded covenant for convenience, obedience for idols, and worship for wealth. But the most shocking part of this passage is not the unfaithfulness of Israel— It is the **unrelenting faithfulness of God**.

Let’s pause here for a moment: **Would you say yes to a calling that guarantees you heartbreak?** That’s what Hosea did. This passage is not just about one man’s broken marriage— It’s about a holy God whose love is so relentless, so unfathomable, so stubborn, that He keeps pursuing a people who keep running away.

**Israel’s Unfaithfulness:** To understand Hosea’s story, we need to step into the world of 8th-century BCE Israel. Hosea prophesied during a time of **economic prosperity but spiritual poverty** in the **Northern Kingdom of Israel**, during the reign of King Jeroboam II. Outwardly, the nation was thriving, trade was booming, cities were growing, and the economy was stable. But inwardly, the country was **rotting**. People were **worshiping Baal (an idol)**, the fertility god of the Canaanites. They were committing **social injustice, corrupting worship, and oppressing the poor**. **Covenant:** God entered into a covenant with Israel, like a marriage. God said: *“I will be your God, and you will be my people.”* But Israel broke that covenant again and again. And so, God calls Hosea to **live out** the drama of **divine heartbreak**.

**HOSEA’S MARRIAGE TO GOMER (vv. 2–3)**

*“Go, marry a wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom, for the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the Lord.”* God tells Hosea: Marry Gomer. She will be unfaithful. This is not a normal marriage—it’s a living prophecy. Imagine Hosea, a righteous man, explaining to his friends: “The Lord has called me to marry someone who will betray me.” And they say: *“Are you sure it’s God you heard?”* But Hosea obeys. Why? Because his marriage will become a mirror of **God’s relationship with Israel**. And Gomer, his wife, represents the people, beloved but wayward. This reveals something powerful: **God’s love isn’t sentimental—it’s sacrificial**. God doesn’t love because it’s easy—God loves because it’s holy. This is not romantic love. It’s *covenant* love.

**THE CHILDREN: NAMES OF JUDGMENT (vv. 4–9):** The story intensifies when Gomer bears three children, each named by God.

**1. Jezreel – “God will sow / scatter” (v. 4):** This name recalls the **bloody massacre** at Jezreel, where Jehu slaughtered many in a violent attempt to seize power. God says, *“I will punish the house of Jehu for the blood of Jezreel.”* **Jezreel** means both judgment and scattering—God will undo the kingdom.

**2. Lo-Ruhamah – “No mercy” (v. 6):** God says, “I will no longer have compassion on Israel.” This name stings. It declares the **withdrawal of divine protection**. We often assume God will always be patient, but here we see that **persistent rebellion invites real consequences**.

**3. Lo-Ammi – “Not my people” (v. 9):** The covenant formula is reversed: “You are not my people, and I am not your God.” This is the moment where it seems the relationship is broken beyond repair. But let’s not stop here. Because **God’s judgment is never His final word**.

### **GRACE INTERRUPTS: THE TURN IN VERSE 10**

*“Yet the Israelites will be like the sand of the sea... In the place where it was said to them, ‘You are not my people,’ it shall be said to them, ‘Children of the Living God.’”* God interrupts the judgment with **grace**. The “Lo” names—No mercy, Not my people—will be reversed. Jezreel, the place of bloodshed, will become a place of sowing mercy. The children with painful names will receive new identities.

This is the **heart of the Gospel** in Hosea: **God disciplines, but He never gives up. God may scatter, but He always sows again**. God is saying: “My people have broken my heart, but I will not stop loving them.” This is the kind of God we

serve: A God who loves even when rejected. A God who pursues even when we run. A God who rewrites names, reverses judgment, and restores identity.

**OUR STORY in GOD’S STORY:** Friends, this is not just Israel’s story. This is **our** story. We are Gomer. We are the unfaithful bride. We chase other loves—success, money, addiction, appearances, distractions. We say, “God, I trust You”—but we live like we don’t. And yet, **God never stops calling us back.**

**So, what do we do?**

**1. Acknowledge Our Spiritual Unfaithfulness:** We must name our idols. Like Israel, we turn to what cannot save—career, pleasure, control, comfort, even religious ritual. **What is your Baal?** What are you chasing that is stealing your loyalty from God?

**2. Return to the God Who Won’t Let Go:** God is not angry because He hates us. God grieves because He loves us. He longs for restoration. Hosea 6:1 says: *“Come, let us return to the Lord; for He has torn us, that He may heal us; He has struck us down, and He will bind us up.”*

**3. Receive Your New Name:** You are not *Lo-Ammi*—not my people. You are *Children of the Living God*. You are not *Lo-Ruhamah*—No mercy. You are *Beloved*. Your past does not define your identity. **God does.**

**4. Live in Covenant Faithfulness:** God’s love is not a license to sin. It is **an invitation to holiness**. To live differently. To love God with heart, soul, mind, and strength. Live like you belong to a God who never gives up on you.

**Jesus, the True Hosea:** In the fullness of time, God didn’t just send another prophet. He sent **His Son**—Jesus—the true and better Hosea. Jesus came to **marry** a broken, unfaithful bride: the Church. He came to redeem Gomer—you and me. He bore our shame. He took our “Lo-Ammi” and renamed us: **Sons and Daughters of God**. Romans 9:25 quotes Hosea: *“Those who were not my people I will call ‘my people,’ and her who was not beloved I will call ‘beloved.’”* That is the Good News.

**Let us pray:** God of Hosea and Gomer, You love us when we are lovable and when we are not. You call us back when we’ve strayed. You change our names from shame to beloved. Help us to return to You. To trust You again. To live like we are truly Yours. In Jesus’ name, Amen