

**Something to consider in prep for Valentine's Day**

Consider this your friendly neighborhood week in advance service announcement, especially for you males, next Sunday is Valentine's Day. Valentine's Day is the holiday in our country that we focus on "LOVE." Hopefully showing love is a focus every day for us, but Valentine's Day presents an opportunity to be more intentional in showing family and friends just how much we love and appreciate them. As we prepare to celebrate Valentine's Day 2021, let us consider the love advice God gives us in Hosea 2:14-20.

**<sup>14</sup> "Therefore I am now going to allure her; I will lead her into the desert and speak tenderly to her. <sup>15</sup> There I will give her back her vineyards, and will make the Valley of Achor a door of hope. There she will sing as in the days of her youth, as in the day she came up out of Egypt.**

**<sup>16</sup> "In that day," declares the LORD, "you will call me 'my husband'; you will no longer call me 'my master.' <sup>17</sup> I will remove the names of the Baals from her lips; no longer will their names be invoked. <sup>18</sup> In that day I will make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field and the birds of the air and the creatures that move along the ground. Bow and sword and battle I will abolish from the land, so that all may lie down in safety.**

**<sup>19</sup> I will betroth you to me forever; I will betroth you in righteousness and justice, in love and compassion. <sup>20</sup> I will betroth you in faithfulness, and you will acknowledge the LORD.**

The prophet Hosea was called by God to minister to the Northern Kingdom of Israel in the mid 700's B.C. These were really the glory days of the 210-year history of the Northern Kingdom (not to be confused with the Southern Kingdom of Israel or Judah – the nation from whom God would send Jesus). Under the leadership of King Jeroboam II, the Northern Kingdom of Israel was outwardly prospering, but spiritually they were unhealthy. God was very specific before the time of Jesus in how he wanted the people of Israel to worship him. The Northern Kingdom decided they didn't want to follow God's plan completely so they took bits of God's way and combined it with the worship practices of the unbelieving nations around them. They built their own places of worship so that the people didn't have to travel to Jerusalem to worship. They chose priests to serve them that were not from the tribe of Levi as God directed. They celebrated worship festivals, but they were not the ones God had established. Their worship rituals included sex with prostitutes that supposedly would please the gods and their nation would be blessed with rain, good crops, and good fortune. The prophet Amos was a contemporary of Hosea who described the spiritual health of the Northern Kingdom of Israel in this way – the rich exploited the poor, business owners cheated their customers, judges accepted bribes for favorable judgments, the people talked like they knew God personally but their lives showed that they did not know him very well or at all.

So God had the prophet Hosea do something unbelievable – he had him marry and stay married to a woman who was blatantly unfaithful to him. Hosea had three children with this woman, but I'm sure he didn't know if those children were really his. Just imagine how painful this relationship would have been for Hosea. This man of God being continually hurt and humiliated by this adulterous and unfaithful wife. Why would God make Hosea do such a thing? To give Israel a visual picture of how they were being

unfaithful to God. In a sense God had married the children of Israel. Out of all the nations on earth he chose them to be his people. Yet they constantly were unfaithful to him. Can we relate to Israel? God married each of us. Scripture speaks in several places of how God is the husband and his bride is the Church – Christians like you and me. Before the creation of the world, God chose us to be his marriage partner. At our conversion God committed to loving each of us for better or for worse. Daily God is putting his love on display as he provides for our physical needs and many times our wants too. In Word and Sacrament God continues to come to us recommitting his love and faithfulness to you and me. How do we often respond to God's love? We take his love and blessings for granted. We act as if his love is old, stale, and not meeting our needs anymore. We crane our necks and keep our eyes open on the lookout for love that seems more exciting and desirable than God's love. We allow ourselves to be seduced by the people and things of this world and we devote our time and energy and resources to wining and dining them. In short, each of us has been and continues to be the adulterous and unfaithful bride of God.

One might expect God in righteous anger to divorce us, but he doesn't. As we prepare to celebrate Valentine's Day 2021 let us reflect on how God loves people like us who are tough to love. <sup>14</sup> **"Therefore I am now going to allure her; I will lead her into the desert and speak tenderly to her. <sup>15</sup> There I will give her back her vineyards, and will make the Valley of Achor a door of hope. There she will sing as in the days of her youth, as in the day she came up out of Egypt"** (vs. 14-15). During the season of Epiphany, many of our lessons mention good things happening in the desert or wasteland. John the Baptist carried out his baptisms of repentance in the wilderness. Instead of divorcing us for our unfaithfulness God continues to take us to the desert, where he tenderly and patiently calls us to repent of our sins. Calling people to repentance is never a pleasant thing to do, just ask God about that in the Valley of Achor, literally the Valley of Trouble. It was in the Valley of Achor that God had a repentant Achan and his family stoned to death for keeping some of the spoils of war in the siege of Jericho even though God forbid the nation of Israel from doing this during this first battle to conquer the Promised Land of Canaan. The Valley of Achor was a visual reminder of the seriousness and consequences of sin. Yet here God says the Valley of Achor will be a **"door of hope."** It's only through repentance that we truly see our need for God's love and forgiveness in Christ. Day after day, God patiently is leading us to repent and day after day God is ready with the open arms of his forgiving love. When repentance and forgiveness happens in a relationship then the healing and strengthening of the relationship can begin. It's almost like the relationship is fresh and new again remembering the good ol' days of being freed from Egypt for Israel, or for you and me – the day of our conversion, baptism, or confirmation.

One might expect God in righteous anger to divorce us, but he doesn't. As we prepare to celebrate Valentine's Day 2021 let us reflect on how God loves people like us who are tough to love. <sup>16</sup> **"In that day," declares the LORD, "you will call me 'my husband'; you will no longer call me 'my master.'** <sup>17</sup> **I will remove the names of the Baals from her lips; no longer will their names be invoked. <sup>18</sup> In that day I will make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field and the birds of the air and the creatures that move along the ground. Bow and sword and battle I will abolish from the land, so that all may lie down in safety"** (vs. 16-18). Note how optimistic God is concerning our relationship with him. He doesn't give up because he doesn't want anyone to perish. Despite our daily unfaithfulness, God is optimistic that better and more peaceful times are ahead. God is optimistic that as he shows his love to us more and more that each of us will appreciate him more. We will affectionately call him "husband." We will more vigilantly fight temptations to devote our time, energy, and affection to the Baals of this world.

One might expect God in righteous anger to divorce us, but he doesn't. As we prepare to celebrate Valentine's Day 2021 let us reflect on how God loves people like us who are tough to love. <sup>19</sup> **I will betroth**

**you to me forever; I will betroth you in righteousness and justice, in love and compassion. <sup>20</sup> I will betroth you in faithfulness, and you will acknowledge the LORD” (vs. 19-20).** In Jesus day, when a couple got married they went through a betrothal period. They were legally married, but they wouldn't enjoy all the blessings of marriage for a time like living together and a sexual relationship. During this betrothal period the bride was to always be ready for her husband to show up and bring her to the wedding banquet and to fully enjoy the blessings of marriage. Jesus married each of us on the day he brought us to trust in him as Savior. We enjoy the wonderful blessings of full forgiveness for every sin, peace with God, a new reason to live on this earth, and confidence to face every situation in life. As Jesus bride, we need to be ready at any time for him to return to bring us to the wedding banquet in heaven where we will fully enjoy the blessings of being married to our Savior. Despite our continued unfaithfulness, Jesus continues to recommit himself to us – reminding us through his Word and through his prophets that he will come back on the last day so that we can enjoy an existence like none other and a face to face relationship with him forever.

As you prepare to celebrate Valentine's Day 2021, remember these things. Daily reflect upon how God daily loves people like you and me who are tough to love. Then refreshed by his patience, optimism, and commitment to you – go and put those same qualities into practice in the various relationships you have with others. Amen.