



The Westminster Pulpit

Sermons Preached at Westminster Presbyterian Church
3900 West End Avenue Nashville, Tennessee 37205-1899

“Mercy!”

Sermon on Hosea 1:2-10

Guy D. Griffith

July 27, 2025

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

“But down the road the population of Israel is going to explode past counting, like sand on the ocean beaches. In the very place where they were once named Nobody, they will be named God’s Somebody.”

(Hosea 1:10, *The Message*)

“[Jesus] was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished one of his disciples said to him, ‘Lord, teach us to pray as John taught his disciples.’”

(Luke 11:1, *NRSV*)

Introduction:

This summer, we’ve been hearing a lot from the prophets. Donovan and Will tackled Elijah a few weeks ago. Then I had Elisha. Today we have Hosea. He was an eighth-century prophet writing contemporaneously with First Isaiah, roughly from 752-715 BCE. Hosea wrote in a time of “deep historical crisis that featured the rising threat of the Assyrian Empire that resulted in the destruction of Samaria (the capital of North Israel), an assault on Jerusalem in the South, and eventually an alliance forced on King Ahaz in Jerusalem.”¹

Known as one of the “Minor Prophets” Hosea is the first listed in the “Book of the Twelve” – the collection of twelve prophetic works that are attributed to individual prophets that were on one scroll. “Minor” not in importance, but in length compared to Isaiah, Jeremiah, and

¹ Walter Brueggemann, *From Judgment to Hope: A Study on the Prophets*, (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox, 2019), 51-52.

Ezekiel, each of which is on a scroll of its own. This summer we have come to see how the prophets often act out particular aspects of God's Word to them.

Part of the prophetic vocation seems to have been to carry the pain of the message in one's own soul. To feel and demonstrate God's pain. In our passage from the first chapter, God commands Hosea to marry a promiscuous woman named Gomer, whose unfaithfulness will become a living metaphor for the Israelites' religious apostasy. Hosea is further told to give his children symbolic names that communicate God's displeasure with the people of Israel. And although the text begins with a command concerning his marriage, it's main focus is upon the children and their names. Hear the Word of God:

Text: Hosea 1:2-10

2When the Lord first spoke through Hosea, the Lord said to Hosea, "Go, take for yourself a wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom, for the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the Lord." 3So he went and took Gomer daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son. 4And the Lord said to him, "Name him Jezreel; for in a little while I will punish the house of Jehu for the blood of Jezreel, and I will put an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel. 5On that day I will break the bow of Israel in the valley of Jezreel." 6She conceived again and bore a daughter. Then the Lord said to him, "Name her Lo-ruhamah, for I will no longer have pity on the house of Israel or forgive them. 7But I will have pity on the house of Judah, and I will save them by the Lord their God; I will not save them by bow, or by sword, or by war, or by horses, or by horsemen."

8When she had weaned Lo-ruhamah, she conceived and bore a son. 9Then the Lord said, "Name him Lo-ammi, for you are not my people and I am not your God." 10Yet the number of the people of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea, which can be neither measured nor numbered; and 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." The Word of the Lord!

Sermon:

"There are times," my friend Jill Duffield observes, "when the 'not appropriate for children' parts of the Bible come screaming to the forefront, times when the bulletin should have at least a PG-13 label on it."² Our text from Hosea is a case in point. Mercifully, it doesn't show up in the lectionary on Mother's Day! Right from the start the book of Hosea jumps into the deep end. There's no sugar coating it; God is not happy, and you know it. Contrast that with our Gospel passage from Luke which sounds like sunshine and summertime by comparison. *"He was praying in a certain place, and after he finished, one of his disciples said to him, 'Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples'"* (Luke 11:1). Alex, I'll take prayer for \$1,000 rather than Hosea for \$200. How about you?

² Jill Duffield, *Lectionary Reflections, Cycle C: Lectionary Bible Commentary for Preachers and Teachers*, (Lima, OH: CSS Publishing Company, 2021), 199,

But there's more in common in these two readings than you'd think. In a sense both are "in-your-face" Bible passages. Hosea starts out that way and Luke ends up there with one of Jesus' shocking parables. Both reveal that "ultimately, God cannot resist pouring out compassion upon creation, problematic, corrupt and recalcitrant as it may be."³

Listen again to the last verse from Hosea: "Yet the number of people of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea, which can neither be measured nor numbered; and 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'" (Hosea 1:10). I like how Eugene Peterson renders the verse in *The Message*, "*But down the road the population of Israel is going to explode past counting, like sand on the ocean beaches. In the very place where they were once named Nobody, they will be named God's Somebody*" (Hosea 1:10, *The Message*). And Luke: "*If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?*" (Luke 11:13).

Knowing the ending we can tackle the beginning and middle of both passages. No need to leave Hosea on the board for another contestant.

So, what does Hosea have to do with asking, seeking, and knocking? How do Gomer and Hosea relate to Our Father and our sleeping friend?

In the first place, I think it has to do with throwing off societal norms, disregarding what others think of such inappropriate behavior, and following God's instructions, regardless of how troubling such obedience appears in the world. That seems obvious in Hosea's case, but it is also true for Luke.

You have to love Jesus' seemingly benign and gentle tutorial on prayer. So, we don't miss how bold this prayer is, Jesus couples it – a radical one if we take seriously the petitions and the relationship with God that they imply – with the story of the literal knocking.

In her commentary of Luke A.-J. Levine calls it the "Parable of the Pushy Pal."⁴ This story of the sleeping friend who disregards the culture's hospitality imperative and the 'pushy pal' who made a ruckus in the middle of the night are both examples of boorish behavior. Both would make Miss Manners naughty list.

And yet, this is the parable Jesus used to tell us how to pray. Be as in-your-face, uncivilized, uncouth, and socially embarrassing as these two. It is almost as attention getting and scandalous as taking a promiscuous wife and bearing children with her.

These two passages are as anti-nice-church-people as possible. They force us to reconsider what it means to worship, what church and church-folk look like, and how children of the living God are to act. It's not the vision of buttoned-down, beautiful people politely passing

³ Duffield, *ibid.*, 199.

⁴ Amy-Jill Levine and Ben Witherington III, *The Gospel of Luke* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 315.

the peace. It's reminiscent of the writer Annie Dillard's observation in *Teaching a Stone to Talk* where she asks,

Why do people in church seem like cheerful, brainless tourists on a package tour of the Absolute? ... It is madness to wear ladies straw hats and velvet hats to church; We should all be wearing crash helmets. Ushers should issue life preservers and signal flares; and lash us to our pews. For the sleeping god may wake someday and take offense, or the waking god may draw us to where we can never return.⁵

We're called to take seriously the "trouble" or "bother" in Luke 11:7. This is no minor interruption or easy ask. This is the kind of late-night disruption that distresses the folks in the house and those living in the neighborhood. Looky-loos rubberneck. Channel 4 reporters show up. The word that gets translated as "persistence" in Luke 8? That's just a polite rendering of what is more like "shamelessness" and "impertinence." One lexicon says, "lack of sensitivity to what is proper, careless about good opinion of others, impudence, ignoring convention." Something like, "because of this shameless disturbance he will get up and give him whatever he needs."

I don't know about you, but that's the kind of prayer circle I want to join! No bow your heads and close your eyes here. Instead, pound on the door, wake up the neighbors, disturb the dogs, make a scene until the people with the power give you what you knocked on the door to get – because otherwise there'll be no rest for anyone concerned. How's that for a model for the church?

Shameless – like doing the impossible, impolite thing that God commands, taking Gomer for a wife and loving her and Jezreel, Lo-ruhamah, and Lo-ammi, no matter what the world thinks of them or you and until God can't resist compassion any longer and they are called children of the living God again.

What if our churches were more like Hosea and bore God's anguish and shame and mercy? What if they were sanctuaries for Gomer and her children, a place where the pitiless and people-less are loved as God's own? What might that look like here in this place where – as the hymn sings:

new light is streaming; now is the darkness vanished away;
see in this space our fears and our dreamings
brought here to you in the light of this day.
Gather us in, the lost and forsaken;
gather us in, the blind and the lame;
call to us now, and we shall awaken;
we shall arise at the sound of our name.⁶

⁵ I've known this quote since the book came out, but I didn't have access to my copy of the book, (<https://paulvanderklay.me/2012/06/07/annie-dillard-quote-on-crash-helmets-needed-for-worship/>)

⁶ Hymn #401, "Here in this Place," *Glory to God*, (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013).

What's your name? Two of our staff members, Hannah Norris and Will Wellman, are getting ready to become parents in the coming weeks. All of us on staff are pressuring them to tell us what names they plan to give their babies, but they're holding out. The Dutch Catholic priest, writer and theologian, Henri Nouwen, says that God gives each of us a particular name. "All I want to say to you is," when God looks at you, "You are the Beloved."⁷ That's your core identity. That's your real name.

Our psalm this morning, Psalm 138, is a particular favorite of mine. I learned to pray it during a difficult time in my life and ministry. If you got hold of my Bible, you'd find all kinds of marginal notes written around it. Verse seven is underlined: *"Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you preserve me against the wrath of my enemies; you stretch out your hand, and your right hand delivers me"* (Ps. 138:7). In the margin is a date, 12/1/92. Off hand, I can't recall what specific thing I was struggling with then, but I can - through an old journal - see what was going on. But then comes verse eight. *"The Lord will fulfill his purpose for me"* and I've crossed out the "me" and written "Guy." "The Lord will fulfill his purpose for **Guy**." The verse continues: *"Your steadfast love, O Lord, endures forever. Do not forsake the work of your hands."* In the margin I've added next to it, "I am the work of your hands."

Friends, we are God's Beloved. Our texts today remind us that God's mercy is forever sure and because of it we are called to pray with confidence, boldness, persistence, and joy. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Copyright©Guy D. Griffith 2025

⁷ Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Life of the Beloved: Spiritual Living in a Secular World, Tenth Anniversary Edition*, (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2002), 30.