

## **Pity on the House**

July 24, 2022

### Hosea 1:2-10

<sup>2</sup>When the LORD first spoke through Hosea, the LORD said to Hosea, “Go, take for yourself a wife of prostitution and have children of prostitution, for the land commits great prostitution by forsaking the LORD.”<sup>3</sup> So he went and took Gomer daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son.<sup>4</sup> And 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.”<sup>5</sup> On that day I will break the bow of Israel in the Valley of Jezreel.”

<sup>6</sup>She 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.”<sup>7</sup> But 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.”<sup>8</sup> When she had weaned Lo-ruhamah, she conceived and bore a son.<sup>9</sup> Then the LORD said, “Name him Lo-ammi, for you are not my people, and I am not your God.”

<sup>10</sup> Yet 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.”



Last week, Pastor John talked about ripe fruit and rotten fruit, as God showed the prophet Amos that what seems good on the surface can be rotten and corrupt deep down, and we have the responsibility to call a halt to practices that make the strong stronger, and further abuse the weak and the poor and those who still suffer from injustices.

Today we begin to walk with Hosea. God asked Hosea to put his own emotions and sense of righteousness through the ring. God had a message for Hosea to deliver to the people, but in order to speak, Hosea needed to understand first the pain and sorrow of rejection and abandonment and betrayal, and second the outrageous mercy of love given in return for hurt. God's love is risky love. And God calls us to risky love as well. Before I pray, let's take a moment to reflect:

When did you either offer or receive risky love?

When did you love someone even while they lashed out at you because of their disease or illness?

When did you receive love after you deeply hurt someone?

When did you forgive when you were deeply hurt?

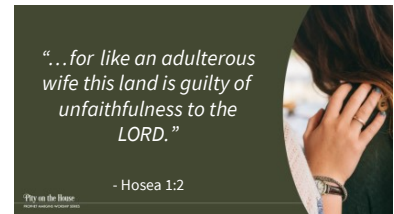
Please know that this message is not about allowing others to trample boundaries or destroy our safety. Sometimes love means keeping distance, praying from afar, or asking another to take on that burden of prayer for a situation that we can't tackle.

But this message is about risky love, love that is hard. Because, after all, we are not the ones to draw the lines that say, “This one is worthy, but this one is not.” We are called to love persistently, compassionately, generously, even those who are consistently hard to love. This message needs to begin with prayer:

God, as we struggle with the concept of loving those who don’t or can’t return our love, and as we struggle with loving those we don’t want to love because of our differences, keep our hearts connected to You. You are the source of all love. You are the teacher of love. And You are the first to love. May our hearts and minds be set on You, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Please turn with me to Hosea 1. We see in verse 2 God instructs Hosea, saying, “Go, take for yourself a wife of prostitution and have children of prostitution.” Whoa, this is an unusual assignment! And this is how Hosea is expected to begin his ministry! Why would God ask a would-be prophet to take a wife who will continue to be unfaithful to him? For the ancient Israelites, certain acts were reserved for love and marriage, and prostitutes engaged in those acts WITHOUT love OR marriage. Acts that looked like intimacy, but they were shallow, cold, and meaningless.

According to the NIV, God tells Hosea: “for like an adulterous wife this land is guilty of unfaithfulness to the LORD.” The religion of the Israelites at that time was also shallow, cold, and meaningless.



God was the God who delivered, rescued, and redeemed the people, yet they were swayed by idols, compromising their relationship with God. Those who once worshiped, praised, and celebrated God now abandoned God in favor of false idols. God wants Hosea to know the despair, the bitter sting of unreturned love.



And again, why? Well, God is preparing Hosea for prophetic ministry. God's people were disobedient and rebellious, yet God had pity on them and desired for them to return. But in order to speak the message, Hosea needs to KNOW the message. In order to preach to the people about their disloyalty to a God who loved them endlessly, he first needed to understand God's desperate need for the people to know. He needed to live the heartbreak of this rejection.

After all, it is hard to speak about things we don't know. Have you ever been in a tough situation, and the only people giving you advice have never experienced what you are going through? You wonder, how would they know???

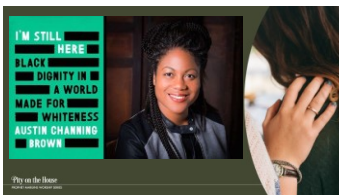
But we do know of women and men who have endured hardships and become amazing prophets of God's love. One who came to my mind is Mother Theresa, now called St. Theresa, who received a call to minister to the poorest of the poor. She did not accomplish this by sponsoring fundraisers from where she lived in Ireland, sending money to others who distributed resources.



Nor did she set up prayer vigils in a church in her native town of Skopje, Macedonia. Her call was to move to Calcutta, India. She began by living as simply as the people she lived with. She learned the needs and responded with love. She loved people who had terrible skin lesions, whom no one else would touch. She loved people with AIDS and tuberculosis, wanting only that they would know how much God loved them. They believed her because she lived it with them. Her messages to us in the modern countries taught us love because her experience gave her the passion to share it.

Yes, passion comes from the human experience.

And passion comes from the desire to see God's redemptive, healing love at work.



One of my favorite current books is *I'm Still Here: Being Black in a World Made for Whiteness*, by Austin Channing Brown. It's not my favorite because it makes me feel good and happy. It's

my favorite because it showed me why I shouldn't feel good and happy in this climate of political and social injustice toward Americans who are not white. Ms. Brown, a Black American, is a Christian who grew up straddling the realities of Black and white. She challenges me to notice where I hold on to superiority, and why that hurts my sisters and brothers who look or live differently from me. Ms. Brown points out my responsibility to speak out and act against injustice. To me, Austin Channing Brown is a modern-day prophet whose message is difficult to receive, speaking encouragement to those who face inequality every day, and challenging the rest of us who need to hear that we are not always walking in God's intention for restorative grace for all.

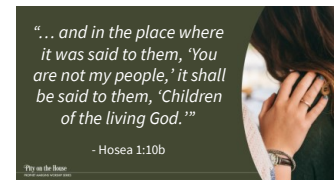


Hosea also obeyed his difficult call. In verse 3, Hosea marries Gomer, and the lessons begin. In verse 4, we see a child is born, and Hosea must name him Jezreel, because in the Valley of

Jezreel, the people will be punished. The punishment foretold here will be the exile of the Hebrew people to Babylon many years later. Now notice the names of the next two children that come: Lo-Ruhamah, “not loved”; Lo-Ammi, “not my people.” The Israelites have not loved God, so they will not feel God’s love. They have not wanted to be God’s people, so they will not be able to be called God’s people, and God will not be their God. And yet....

And yet, God foreshadows God’s unrelenting, never-ending love. Hosea’s story to come is going to be filled with heartache and redemption, just like our story with God, just like the Israelites’ story with God.

Verse 10: “Yet the Israelites will be like the sand on the seashore, which cannot be measured or counted. In the place where it was said to them, ‘You are not my people,’ they will be called ‘children of the living God.’” Hosea 1:10



In these words, God reveals God’s risky love. God pities and loves the people. The people have rejected God and yet God desires to love them still! If we read further into the book of Hosea, we see that this man demonstrates God’s forgiving, healing,

redemptive love by forgiving, redeeming, and loving Gomer over and over again. The risk is that rejection can and will continue to happen. But God's love remains.

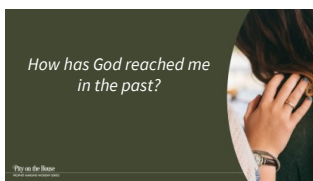
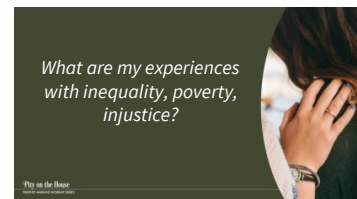
Now comes the part where I ask you to look at yourself. Are you a participant in risky love? What difficult task might be in store for you, where you can experience and share the love of God in an amazing way?

For most of us, this concept is confusing at best, and possibly terrifying. We don't know if we have the will to love like that, or the tools to put it into practice, or if we will succeed or fail. We don't even know where to begin.

So, luckily for you – haha – I have a way to start.

The first question to ask is:

What are my experiences with inequality, poverty, bullying, unfair labor practices, abandonment, abuse, bereavement, weakness, substance abuse, or other injustices?

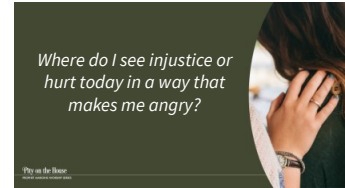


Next:

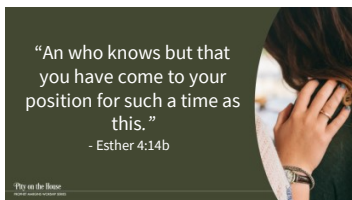
How has God reached me in the past?

And:

Where do I see injustice or hurt today in a way that gets me angry?



Your answers to these questions may lead to an unexpected adventure in loving the world. Remember Esther's uncle's words to her when she was faced with the decision



whether to help the Hebrews at great risk to her safety or to leave them to their own devices. Mordecai said, “**And who knows but that you have come to your royal position**

**for such a time as this?”** Esther 4:14b

Has God given you a position or experience – for such a time as this?

For a word of hope, turn with me now to Psalm 85.

This Psalm was written after the exile to Babylon, but before full restoration of relationship between God and the Israelites.



Here we are reminded that God showed favor to God's people in ancient times:

Vv 2-3 “You forgave the iniquity of your people and covered all their sins. You set aside all your wrath and turned from your fierce anger.”



And the psalmist asks for restoration again:

vv4-7 “Restore us again, O God our Savior, and put away your displeasure toward us. Will you be angry with us forever?....Will you not revive us again, so that your people may rejoice in you? Show us your unfailing love, O LORD and grant us your salvation.”

In this in-between time, the bitterness may be over, but work needs to be done to be fully restored in loving union. There is such longing for that return to grace, and such hope for the life lived in grace!

This is our invitation. Like the psalmist, we also may wonder if God is angry with the world.. But we’re invited to call out, to ask God for revival, that we may again rejoice!

So while we call out, may we act. And while we act, may we always be in prayer! For so Jesus has instructed us.

I will close with these words from Jesus, our ultimate redeemer, which he spoke after instructing the disciples in how to pray:



““So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. <sup>10</sup>For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.” Luke 11:9-10

Will you pray with me?

God, who is Lord of the ancient prophets and Lord of us who wish to bring your message of love and hope today, fill our minds with your words. As we ponder what we've heard this morning, bring to each of us the call you intend each to hear. And spur us on as a community of believers into more acts of love, born of love and led by love, out into our neighborhoods and cities. Amen.

### **GPS – Grow, Pray, Study**

- 1) *Grow*. What trauma or hard thing have you been through when you experienced God's healing and restoration? How could this help others on a similar path?
- 2) *Pray*. Along the same lines, who do you know that is experiencing trauma, grief, or some other hardship? Take time each day to life them in prayer.
- 3) *Study*. Read Hosea 10:1-10. This is but a sampling of how Israel has sinned against God. If you were God, how would you feel? How would you respond?