

Hosea 14

This week we will be looking at Hosea 14 a little closer, as we have paused our series in Philippians for a week to lean into this vision of Gospel-flourishing that God has given his people.

Hosea 14

¹ *Return, O Israel, to the LORD your God,
for you have stumbled because of your iniquity.*

² *Take with you words
and return to the LORD;
say to him,*

*“Take away all iniquity;
accept what is good,
and we will pay with bulls
the vows of our lips.*

³ *Assyria shall not save us;
we will not ride on horses;
and we will say no more, ‘Our God,’
to the work of our hands.
In you the orphan finds mercy.”*

⁴ *I will heal their apostasy;
I will love them freely,
for my anger has turned from them.*

⁵ *I will be like the dew to Israel;
he shall blossom like the lily;
he shall take root like the trees of Lebanon;*

⁶ *his shoots shall spread out;
his beauty shall be like the olive,
and his fragrance like Lebanon.*

⁷ *They shall return and dwell beneath my shadow;
they shall flourish like the grain;
they shall blossom like the vine;
their fame shall be like the wine of Lebanon.*

⁸ *O Ephraim, what have I to do with idols?
It is I who answer and look after you.
I am like an evergreen cypress;
from me comes your fruit.*

⁹ *Whoever is wise, let him understand these things;
whoever is discerning, let him know them;
for the ways of the LORD are right,
and the upright walk in them,
but transgressors stumble in them.*

Day 1

HOSEA 14:1-3

¹ Return, O Israel, to the LORD your God, for you have stumbled because of your iniquity. ² Take with you words and return to the LORD; say to him, "Take away all iniquity; accept what is good, and we will pay with bulls the vows of our lips. ³ Assyria shall not save us; we will not ride on horses; and we will say no more, 'Our God,' to the work of our hands. In you the orphan finds mercy."

As this chapter opens, we are reminded of our need for the mercy of God, for as the text says, we stumble because of our iniquity (v. 1). The book of Hosea paints a picture of a man who pursues his adulterous wife. This wife has pursued other lovers and her heart is drawn away from home. She has broken trust, betrayed hearts, and blasted away the foundations of a relationship, yet she is pursued and sought after by a lover who will not let her go. God's people are the adulterous lover. Their wandering eye has landed on politics as their security. They have lost a moral footing and pursued happiness by means of feeding desires. Ultimately, they have sought other gods whose path is easier than the path of YHWH. The result? They have stumbled badly. Their iniquity has brought separation in their intimacy with YHWH. They are orphaned, in need of mercy.

Tomorrow, we will focus on the invitation that the Lord has in these verses for his people to return. But today, we pause to reflect on the fact that through the ages God's people stumble in similar ways. Israel sought security through alliance with Egypt on the west or Assyria on the east (Hos. 7:11), rather than resting on YHWH. How often do we seek earthly security through politics of the right or left rather than resting on the finished work of Christ? Israel lost their moral footing and did not curb their gluttonous appetites (Hos. 4:1, 2). How often do we seek significance by means of the goods of this world, an escape from reality, a dalliance here, a dalliance there? Paul speaks of folks making their bellies their gods (Phil. 3:19); we let our appetites rule us! Ultimately, like Israel, we find ourselves bowing to false gods: success, comfort, power, money, sex, etc... As we seek this Gospel-flourishing, the first step is to acknowledge that we need mercy!

Tomorrow, we will look more closely at the repentance that God invites. For today, we conclude with one last, hopeful, note. As we surrender to the Lord and lean into his Gospel promises, there is no more stumbling. *"Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen"* (Jude 24–25). No Stumbling. Blameless. Great Joy. Our Savior is merciful indeed!

prayer

Lord, it is so true that in ourselves we are prone to stumble. We are so easily enticed by the things of this world. We so easily forsake you, the fountain of living water, and dig for ourselves cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water. We are sorry for our foolishness. We repent of our rebelliousness. Keep us from stumbling. May the finished work of Christ be our life's foundation. In the glorious and majestic name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

Day 2

HOSEA 14:1-3

¹ Return, O Israel, to the LORD your God, for you have stumbled because of your iniquity. ² Take with you words and return to the LORD; say to him, “Take away all iniquity; accept what is good, and we will pay with bulls the vows of our lips. ³ Assyria shall not save us; we will not ride on horses; and we will say no more, ‘Our God,’ to the work of our hands. In you the orphan finds mercy.”

Yesterday, we saw how Israel’s continued apostasy resulted in a broken relationship with their covenant God. The dramatic portrayal we see through Gomer’s unfaithfulness is meant to wake us up to both the gravity of our sin and the astonishing generosity of our God. God is telling us that our sin is not just a bad/wrong choice; it is first an offense against him, an assault on his authority over our lives. God will not overlook our rebellion, and our attempts to manage our sin never work. Denying, minimizing, renaming, saying and doing good things, weeping without changing—these are some of the ways we avoid facing God.

God has a better way. Since the beginning, when Adam and Eve managed their sin by covering themselves with fig leaves and hiding among the trees in the garden, God initiates reconciliation. He is still asking, “Where are you?” He wants us to come, to “reason together” (Is.1:18). Hosea redeeming his unfaithful wife is a picture of God’s invitation—“Return to the Lord your God.” It is an invitation to come on God’s terms with the words he needs to hear. Earlier, God had chastised them for their *empty* words, but he does need words. God made us in his image, able to communicate truth and live in loving relationships through our words. Satan’s crafty plan to usurp God’s place in the lives of his image-bearers came through a subversion of words. So God gives his people words to bring them back into relationship.

In all this time, God hasn’t changed and neither have we. We too offend God by believing we can decide what is best for us, while still presuming he should continue to provide and protect. God invites us back into relationship by asking/requiring us to repent, to make a decision to stop trusting ourselves and to entrust ourselves to him. He wants to hear words. He needs to hear humble words: “Take away all iniquity.” Our sins make us guilty and we need forgiveness; our sins make us dirty and we need cleansing. And he needs to hear truthful words. Confessing is not just admitting our guilt; it’s agreeing with God’s assessment. We need to acknowledge our idols, the things we trust to bring us security and meaning, the things we use to justify ourselves.

God invites us individually and corporately as his family at Christ Church to be in relationship with him by walking in the light. He is still asking, “Where are you?” and still inviting, “Return to the Lord, your God.” It would be hard to find words more humble or truthful than David’s words of repentance in Psalm 51. Can each of us reading this today bring those words to God as our prayer of confession and repentance, knowing he is waiting to hear them and waiting to receive us? What an encouragement to know we are coming together!

Day 3

HOSEA 14:1a, 3b, 4,5,8

¹ Return, O Israel, to the LORD your God, ... ³ In you the orphan finds mercy.”

⁴ I will heal their apostasy; I will love them freely, for my anger has turned from them. ⁵ I will be like the dew to Israel

⁸ O Ephraim, what have I to do with idols? It is I who answer and look after you. I am like an evergreen cypress; from me comes your fruit.

As Hosea ends and the Lord looks to his people (whom Gomer has represented), he ends his thoughts and words with mercy. God’s character reveals how he acts in the world. He is slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love (Exodus 34). He will forgive the iniquities of his people—healing them, loving them, and turning his anger from them. God has a tender heart for Israel, just as he has called Hosea to have a tender heart for his wife Gomer.

Isaiah 40 gives us another look at God’s tender heart for his people:

¹⁰ Behold, the Lord GOD comes with might,
and his arm rules for him;
behold, his reward is with him,
and his recompense before him.

¹¹ He will tend his flock like a shepherd;
he will gather the lambs in his arms
he will carry them in his bosom,
and gently lead those that are with young.

God comes with might, yet he also gathers his people in his arms, carrying them close to his body and leading them. The imagery is remarkable and humbling all at the same time.

Jesus later revealed himself as the Good Shepherd who is humble and tenderhearted. God’s Son is the one who comes to gather his lambs in his arms, to carry them and lead them to the Father. It’s this tenderhearted Jesus who is also the way, the truth, and the life—the one who offers salvation and mercy. Any time we have compassion for another—when we serve, love, or care for someone around us—we are providing hints of Jesus’s love for others. In fact, it is this very tenderheartedness that moves Jesus-followers to show mercy, love, and care. It’s what inspires us to care for the widows and orphans (James 1), to pursue the broken and brokenhearted with love and care.

Jesus's love is an example to us, just as Hosea the prophet was to be an example to Israel of God the Father's love and faithfulness to this wayward nation.

⁷ My people are bent on turning away from me,
and though they call out to the Most High,
he shall not raise them up at all.

⁸ How can I give you up, O Ephraim?
How can I hand you over, O Israel?
How can I make you like Admah?
How can I treat you like Zeboiim?
My heart recoils within me;
my compassion grows warm and tender.

⁹ I will not execute my burning anger;
I will not again destroy Ephraim;
for I am God and not a man,
the Holy One in your midst,
and I will not come in wrath. (Hosea 11:7-9)

Prayer

Father, you have such mercy and love for your people. Forgive us for the ways we wrong you and others, for the ways we trust in ourselves and the works of our own hands. You are a tenderhearted God, the one who cares for the lowly and the broken. You pursue your people with grace. Move us to see this, feel it, and live it out as an expression of the gospel. In Jesus's name, we pray. Amen.

Day 4

HOSEA 14:5-7

⁵ I will be like the dew to Israel; he shall blossom like the lily; he shall take root like the trees of Lebanon; ⁶ his shoots shall spread out; his beauty shall be like the olive, and his fragrance like Lebanon. ⁷ They shall return and dwell beneath my shadow; they shall flourish like the grain; they shall blossom like the vine; their fame shall be like the wine of Lebanon.

In 2011, we were part of a church tour of Israel. On the first day of the tour, we traveled from Jerusalem down to the Dead Sea and Qumran, where the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered. On that twenty-four-mile trip, we got a stark introduction to the Judean desert. It is as brown and desolate as can be. It is mostly dirt and rocks except for a couple of places where there is water. For those of us who have grown up in Michigan, it is almost hard to imagine land that is so dry and desolate. In our land of 11,000 lakes, we take water completely for granted. Not so in Israel. People living there have to think about water and plan for it their whole lives.

So the Israelites would see this passage in Hosea differently than we would. While we see dew as a nuisance that gets our shoes wet in the morning, they see it as a vital source of moisture that keeps green plants alive. While we appreciate the color of our vegetation, people living in Israel have a deeper understanding of how the colors of trees and crops come to be. They have to work a lot harder to make sure water gets to the places it needs to be for the land to be productive. We mostly just wait for the rain to fall, but rainfall in Jerusalem from May to October is almost non-existent. To have adequate water is to be blessed with life.

Old Testament scholar Derek Kidner writes about the natural imagery of these promises. He says, “We gain a three-fold impression of Israel revived and reconciled to God. First, freshness (dew, flowers, fragrance, beauty, shade); secondly, stability (rooted like the poplar); thirdly, vigor (the spreading shoots of new growth). Like the river of Ezekiel 47, it brings life to everything it reaches.”

To have a healthy relationship with God is to be blessed with life. To understand how God saves us, nourishes us, sustains us, leads us, protects us, and makes us fruitful is perhaps the most important idea we can learn from the Bible.

Prayer

Father, forgive our propensity to take you for granted. May the trees we see every day as we drive and walk, may the produce we inspect and buy in the grocery store, may the rivers and creeks we travel over all remind us of your loving care for us. Then may we be moved to constantly thank and praise you for the graciousness that makes our lives good.

Day 5

HOSEA 14:9

Whoever is wise, let him understand these things; whoever is discerning, let him know them; for the ways of the LORD are right, and the upright walk in them, but transgressors stumble in them.

In our passage today, the wise and discerning are called to understand *these things*, to know *them*, walk in *them*. Transgressors are said to stumble in *them*. Furthermore, the *ESV Study Bible* says Hosea 14:9 beckons us to really grasp the grace of the covenant, and the *New Bible Commentary* (Wenham, Motyer, Carson, France) says Hosea 14:9 emphasizes that “the only way to live is the Lord’s way.” So what are *these things*? What is this verse calling us to see? And why have we looked at this as a church family as part of our all-church retreat?

Hosea is the story of God’s sacrificial love and pursuit of his own who are in the arms of another love. What’s wise about understanding that? And how do transgressors stumble over this? When we realize that God’s love of us is based on his character and not ours, it is liberating. It gives us true freedom. But it is so easy to stumble in our understanding. On the one hand, if we work hard to obey the commandments of God, it’s tempting to think that God loves us because of our obedience, and all kinds of pride and self-importance can come flooding in. However, if we completely disregard the commandments of God, we could think God would never love us--and all kinds of despondency and self-focused regret can come flooding in.

Hosea turns it all upside-down, and that is what the wise understand. God loves those who do not love him. But it doesn’t end there. What happens after God gives his love? He wants to be loved back. He wants us to walk in his ways, because they are right. But because walking in his ways isn’t about earning God’s love, but about us showing our love to God, our obedience doesn’t change our standing before God.

That’s the gospel message. That’s what the wise understand. So, people of Christ Church, we’ve taken this week to remember our story: we ourselves and those around us in this church community are loved by God. Together we celebrate that as we live and worship and invite others in. As those who have received the constant love of God we can help each other through life’s journey with all its joys and sorrows. Let’s help each other, more and more, learn what this means.

prayer

Holy Father, grow wisdom in our hearts, minds, and lives to apply this truth to our everyday lives. Thank you for loving us. Amen.