

The Fourth Sunday in Lent

March 30, 2014

Amazing Grace Lutheran Church - Pastor Chip Wilke

Hosea 5:15-6:3

Then I will go back to my place until they admit their guilt. And they will seek my face; in their misery they will earnestly seek me." "Come, let us return to the LORD. He has torn us to pieces but he will heal us; he has injured us but he will bind up our wounds. After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will restore us, that we may live in his presence. Let us acknowledge the LORD; let us press on to acknowledge him. As surely as the sun rises, he will appear; he will come to us like the winter rains, like the spring rains that water the earth." (NIV)

A little boy got into some trouble with a fellow classmate. Now his teacher told him he needed to write a letter to say he was sorry. Here is the actually letter this boy wrote: "Dear Brody, Miss P. made me write you this note, all I want to say sorry for is not being sorry cause I tried to feel sorry but I don't." While this certainly is not the sweetest apology I've ever heard, perhaps it is at least more honest than many. I'm sure we have all heard or seen or even given the insincere sorry. The child realizes he or she is about to get into trouble and so out comes the quick response "I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry." A person gets backed into a corner so the only option left is to apologize. But the only thing they are really sorry about is getting caught. Have we ever done the same? Such an apology is actually a selfish sorry. All we are doing is trying to save and serve ourselves by saying the words we know others want to hear.

Have we ever tried that with God? Do we ever just say the words or go through the motions of saying we are sorry? Are we ever only sorry that we got caught, sorry that God knows what we did, and now we just want to get out of trouble? Perhaps today we should join that little boy, but I pray we make it sincere sorry for not always being sorry. For: **the Lord desires real repentance not a selfish sorry.**

The nation of Israel had many reasons to say they were sorry. Hosea made this very clear in the first five chapters. Listen to some of the Lord's charges he brings against the people. "***There is no faithfulness, no love, no acknowledgement of God in the land. There is only cursing, lying, and murder, stealing and adultery, they break all bounds, and bloodshed follows bloodshed.***" (4) Not only this, the Lord used Hosea to make a graphic illustration. He was told to marry an unfaithful wife. She was a vivid picture of how Israel had become unfaithful to the Lord by constantly turning to other gods. Now the Lord is going to bring judgment upon these unfaithful people. It will be swift and severe. In the previous verse before our text God says He will be like a lion that tears them to pieces.

Now the Lord continues to speak: "***Then I will go back to my place until they admit their guilt. And they will seek my face; in their misery they will earnestly seek me.***" Now we get to what I see as the worst part of God's judgment against them, even worse than the brutal and barbaric Assyrian army that will soon conquer them. God withdraws His presence from them. The Lord is leaving them to do it alone. If they want to keep turning to other gods, if they think their human alliances with other nations is the solution, let them see how they fair without the Lord. It won't be pretty. God is going to go His place and watch. Yet, we also see here God's intention. He wants His people back. He wants them to admit their

guilt. He wants them to seek Him with all their hearts. He wants them safely back into His saving arms of grace. He wants real repentance.

What does the Lord get from the people of Israel? The rest of our text is their response. You really need to see the whole context and how the Lord reacts to this response to see what Israel is saying. These words just in and of themselves sound pretty good, yet, in reality they were only offering a selfish sorry. Listen closely, ***"Come, let us return to the LORD. He has torn us to pieces but he will heal us; he has injured us but he will bind up our wounds. After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will restore us, that we may live in his presence. Let us acknowledge the LORD; let us press on to acknowledge him. As surely as the sun rises, he will appear; he will come to us like the winter rains, like the spring rains that water the earth."***

The Israelites had been through this dog and pony act before. They had seen how patient and merciful the Lord had been despite their unfaithfulness again and again. They said they will return to God, set their idols aside for now, and the Lord will bind them and heal them. Surely God will deliver them from their enemies as He always has! They may suffer for a time, but then God will restore them. When they talk about acknowledging the Lord again, they meant it is time to bring back the burnt offerings and sacrifices. It was time to go back into the sanctuary and carry through on the religious festivals. The Israelites thought if they said the correct words and went through the right motions God's grace would come to them as sure as the sun rises and the rains water the earth. But there was no real repentance here, not one word admitting their idolatry, no trembling in guilt, no true confession of sin - only a selfish sorry.

Continue to read Hosea this week and see how God feels about their selfish sorry. Then ask ourselves if we have ever offered God the same. As we gather for worship we start by admitting our sins in thought, word, and deed, by confessing we deserve God's punishment now and in eternity, and we say we are truly sorry. Do we always mean it or are there times we are just saying the right words? How about our preparation for the Lord's Supper? Do we properly examine ourselves and recognize why we need this body of Jesus given for us and blood poured out for us? Or are there times we are going through the motions? Do we ever tell God what He wants to hear with every intention of walking out these doors and rushing back into our same familiar sins? Do we ever believe our coming to church and saying the right words and going through the right motions should be enough for God?

Then, dear friends, we need to hear what God thinks about our selfish sorrys. We have just as much reason as Israel to admit our guilt and in our misery seek His face. We have every reason to drop to our knees now in repentance. For as we read in the next verse: ***"the Lord desires mercy not sacrifice and the acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings"***. The Lord wants not just your words and actions – He wants your heart. How does the Lord win our hearts? The Lord remains faithful even to the unfaithful wife named Israel. The Lord remains faithful to unfaithful sinners like you and me.

While His law tears us to pieces, we turn to Jesus and recognize that ***"by His wounds we are healed."*** Yes, on the cross Jesus was pierced for our transgressions, including our every selfish sorry. Yes, the punishment, including God removing His presence, was upon Christ. By it we have peace. On the third day, God did more than restore us – raising Jesus from the dead He declared us not guilty in His sight. Now there is no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus. Now we can rely on our God just as we can the rise rising each day – His

mercies are new every morning, and great is His faithfulness! Now God's grace comes to us like the rains that water the earth. We are refreshed again and again by His forgiveness, by His mercy, by every other promise that is "yes" in Jesus.

Do you recognize what God wanted from Israel? Do you understand what He wants from us? He wants His people back. He wants faithful love which is the only proper response to His unfailing love. He wants to work in our hearts real repentance. So I pray we start today by joining that boy is saying we are sorry for all the times we were not really sorry. And then give thanks for the Savior who takes every selfish sinful sorry away. Then I pray we speak these words because we actually mean them: ***"Come, let us return to the LORD. He has torn us to pieces but he will heal us; he has injured us but he will bind up our wounds. After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will restore us, that we may live in his presence. Let us acknowledge the LORD; let us press on to acknowledge him. As surely as the sun rises, he will appear; he will come to us like the winter rains, like the spring rains that water the earth."*** Amen.