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Pentecost II & Proper 5A
June 7, 2026
Text: Hosea 5:15 – 6:6 & Matthew 9 – 13
Title:

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Music has always been a big part of my life, whether I was making it or listening to it. Like many people, the kind of music that I enjoy has changed over the course of my life, but I have always had a taste that could best be described as eclectic, meaning that I'm into a lot of different styles and genres of music. It wasn't until I was in my late 20's and early 30's that I began to discover an enjoyment for country music, and I can still remember some of the artists and songs that got me interested in it.

One of those artists was Brad Paisley who was releasing some of his first big hits at the time, but the one that really caught my attention was a duet with Alison Krauss called, "Whiskey Lullaby." It's a song with some of the saddest lyrics that I've ever heard, and the music and harmony that the two singers perform would get stuck in my head in a way that I could only describe as haunting in its beauty. The song tells the tragic story of a couple that has broken up. There may be some of you who don't know the song so let me give you the short version. The woman has ended the relationship with the man, and the man takes the situation so hard that he tries to forget her by drinking whiskey. The lyrics tell of him being able to drink some of the pain away, but never to forget his love for the woman. That is until the tragic moment when he "...put that bottle to his head and pulled the trigger," and left "...a note that said I'll love her 'til I die." The song then continues with the woman taking his death so hard and blaming herself that she also turns to whiskey to help her forget. The haunting lyrics echo a similar end for her with the words that she also, "...put that bottle to her head and pulled the trigger," and was found

“...clinging to his picture for dear life.” The award-winning video for this song provides some details that contribute to a fuller story showing that the relationship ended when the man arrived home from war to find his love in bed with someone else, a situation that would likely end any committed relationship.

And that is part of what the prophet Hosea is called by Yahweh to proclaim to His Chosen People in the Northern Kingdom still called Israel. They are guilty of committing adultery against Yahweh by breaking their committed relationship with Him and worshipping other gods. In fact, Hosea is called by Yahweh to illustrate this very real adulterous relationship by marrying a known prostitute himself. Hosea’s wife, Gomer, gave birth to three children that we know of from his writing, and each was intentionally named by Yahweh. The first was a son who was named, Jezreel, which literally means “he will sow,” but the name serves as a foreshadowing of the judgment that is soon to come to Israel which the wickedness of the people is sowing. The second child is a daughter who Yahweh says is to be called, Lo-Ruhamah which literally means, “No Mercy” because Yahweh will no longer show mercy to the Northern Kingdom of Israel, but will still show mercy for Judah in the south. The third child, another son, is named Lo-Ammi which literally means, “Not My People.” Once again, the name makes clear that Yahweh is ready to Judge and cut off the people for their adultery with the idols of Baal and Asherah. Hosea writes that Yahweh said, “Call his name Not My People, for you are not my people, and I am not your God.” All of this is written in the first chapter of Hosea’s prophecy as Yahweh makes it clear that the end of the Northern Kingdom is about to happen if they do not pay attention to the final warnings that are being sent to them. And by the end of Hosea’s work, the Assyrian Empire will have conquered the Northern Kingdom in 722 BC taking most of the

people into exile. Today's reading from Hosea serves as another warning and word of Judgment against them.

Hosea has already illustrated that like a husband who has a cheating wife that he still loves, Yahweh still loves His Chosen People and wants nothing more than for them to repent of their cheating, adulterous, idolatry. They have broken their covenant vows with Him, and He has every right to destroy them. But even as He warns that He will have "No Mercy" on them and will no longer acknowledge them as His people, Yahweh still waits for them to repent. Hosea writes that Yahweh says, "I will return again to my place, until they acknowledge their guilt and seek my face, and in their distress earnestly seek me."

But Yahweh isn't just wanting them to pay lip-service to Him so that they sound faithful and holy. He is looking for sincere repentance and faithfulness which the next verses of today's reading do not have. Even as the people respond with faithful sounding words, Yahweh knows that they are completely insincere. "Come, let us return to the Lord; for he has torn us, that he may heal us; he has struck us down, and he will bind us up. After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him. Let us know; let us press on to know the Lord..." The words of the people sound good, but Yahweh knows what is in the hearts of all people. He knows that His people don't mean what they are saying here, and He says that their words are "...like the dew that goes early away." And He warns them, "...my judgment goes forth as the light. For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings."

As I already said, the people that Hosea is prophesying to in the Northern Kingdom of Israel ultimately do not listen to these warnings, and the Assyrians carry them into exile in 722 BC. But even with the ominous warnings that Hosea delivers from Yahweh, there is also a

message of hope. Hosea is sent to redeem his wife, Gomer, and the names of their children become messages of hope to those who will listen. Hope that will come "...on the third day."

Fast forward about 750 years from the fall of the Northern Kingdom and the time of Hosea's work as a prophet, and today's Gospel reading from Matthew 9 finds Jesus calling the tax collector, Matthew to follow Him. Unlike the response that Hosea receives, Matthew immediately repents, meaning that he turns away from the life that he as been living, and he sincerely follows the Lord, Jesus. Matthew's response is so sincere that he becomes one of the 12 apostles, and he joins the Lord in the next years of His public ministry. But there are still those who have not learned the lesson that Hosea was teaching in the Old Testament and that Jesus is teaching here in the Gospel. The self-righteous Pharisees ask why Jesus is bothering to associate with such undesirable people as tax collectors and sinners. The Lord tells them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.' For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."

The Lord knows. He can see right through the outward religious piety of the Pharisees, and He tries to get them to see that they are in need of His saving work just as much as the tax collectors and sinners that they look down on. They are just as guilty of their own sin as the people that Hosea was prophesying to in his day, the ones that Yahweh called adulterers for their idol worship. Jesus quotes the prophet Hosea that the Lord desires mercy and not sacrifice. It isn't that sacrifices aren't pleasing to Yahweh, but a lack of faithfulness and repentance is and Jesus wants them to learn that.

He calls us to learn the same lesson. Today's world is no less sinful than the people of Hosea's day or the people at the time of Jesus. You only have to look around at the way our world celebrates sin every June calling it "Pride." People may not be openly worshipping stone

idols in our country today, but they do openly worship the god of self as they celebrate homosexuality, transgenderism, and any number of other perversions of God's Creation.

But as Jesus and Hosea called the people who heard them to repentance with God's Word, we are called to the same by God's Word. We are called to repent. It's easy to sit here as a Pharisee, and look at the sinful displays all around us without looking at ourselves to see where we have fallen short of God's Law. Where and how have we been guilty of the same hollow, faithless piety of sacrifice without mercy? Have we loved our neighbors enough to share the truth of the Gospel with them, or have we told ourselves that it's not our responsibility? Have we shown love in helping those who are in need because God has loved us, or have we helped just to look good to those who see us do it? I could go on, but I hope you get the point.

Even though the Law of God is harsh in today's reading from Hosea, there is Hope to be found in his book as well as in the Words of Jesus today. Hope that is given to each and every one of us beginning with the gift of Holy Baptism (*which we will happen once again later this morning/ as we just saw given to Magnolia and Monroe earlier this morning*). In this Holy Sacrament, Yahweh no longer refuses any people, but claims each baptized person as one of His own precious children. He no longer refuses to show mercy because by the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, His mercy overflows to all people, and our relationship with Him is restored.

Yahweh's Word in Hosea 2 says it nicely, "And I will betroth you to me forever. I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy. I will betroth you to me in faithfulness. And you shall know the Lord. And in that day I will answer, declares the Lord...And I will have mercy on No Mercy, and I will say to Not My People, 'You are my people'; and he shall say, 'You are my God.'" Amen. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.