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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
June 25, 2017
3rd after Pentecost

Scripture Lessons: Romans 4:18-25, Matthew 9:9-13
Hymns: 398; 324; 412; 409:1 (248:1-3)

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord
and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Hosea 5:15-6:6

^{5:15} "I will return again to My place
Till they acknowledge their offense.
Then they will seek My face;
In their affliction they will earnestly seek Me."

^{6:1} Come, and let us return to the Lord;
For He has torn, but He will heal us;
He has stricken, but He will bind us up.

² After two days He will revive us;
On the third day He will raise us up,
That we may live in His sight.

³ Let us know,
Let us pursue the knowledge of the Lord.
His going forth is established as the morning;
He will come to us like the rain,
Like the latter *and* former rain to the earth.

⁴ "O Ephraim, what shall I do to you?
O Judah, what shall I do to you?
For your faithfulness is like a morning cloud,
And like the early dew it goes away.

⁵ Therefore I have hewn *them* by the prophets,
I have slain them by the words of My mouth;
And your judgments *are like* light *that* goes forth.

⁶ For I desire mercy and not sacrifice,
And the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings. (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth.
Amen.

In Christ Jesus, God my Savior, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: The Vile Nature of Our Sin

There has been some pretty vile sins reported on the news lately. Not just foreign news, or even national news, but just local news. Yes, we read reports of corruption in Washington, but that hardly shocks us. We hear reports about a TV celebrity who allegedly has sexually abused dozens of women. We hear how terrorists are brutally and indiscriminately killing people, stabbing police officers, mowing down tourists with trucks, slaughtering teen agers as they leave a music concert. But it's not all just in far-away places. Local news reported the sentencing of a man who stabbed his girlfriend in the neck, and watched her bleed for several hours before someone called the police. Or even more vile, the arrest of a young man who had thousands of pornographic images of young children. It turns your stomach. One can't stand it anymore. The wickedness of the world oppresses the soul of the child of God, even as it encroaches on his or her own lives.

You see how vile the sins of others are, how vile they must be before the Lord, and wonder how long can it be before the Lord responds with judgment? How long can it be before the Lord descends with a shout, and brings it all to an end? What we fail to see, as least as well as we ought to, is that our sins are that vile before the Lord. Even if our sins remain locked up in our hearts or minds, the Lord knows the lust of the heart, the Lord knows the perversity of the mind of man. What we ought to be wondering is, "How long can the Lord put up with **me**? My sins are so vile I dare not look up to Lord. My sins are so vile, is there any hope?" The Spirit presents us with a sure and certain hope in the truth that --

THEME: God's Love Is Greater than Our Sin.

Our text begins with a lesson in --

I. God's Tough Love

Tough love is exactly what the first verse of our text describes;

Hosea 5:15 “I will return again to My place
Till they acknowledge their offense.
Then they will seek My face;
In their affliction they will earnestly seek Me.”

The people of Israel did not comprehend the seriousness of their sin and how it was an affront to God. Indeed it is not clear that they even understood that their idol worship alongside of their worship of the true God was wrong at all. They didn't believe the words of the prophets the Lord sent to them.

Such is the influence of this world on the hearts and lives of people who should know better, people who were raised as children of God. God responded by pulling away from the people and withholding the blessings that He would bestow upon them. God didn't do this to be mean. He did this with the hope that the people of Israel, at least some of them, would realize their sin was a serious spiritual problem. He did this with the hope that they would confess their sin and seek the Lord. It was the Lord's desire that in their affliction they would turn back to Him, and turn away from the idols of this world.

When someone embraces sin, and holds it dear, it makes it impossible for God to remain close to that person, no matter how much they might claim to love God. No matter how much they claim to love God their holding to sin, defending sin, practicing sin, even celebrating sin declares that they love themselves, NOT the Lord! Sin separates us from the Lord and His blessings. That includes most especially the blessing of His forgiveness, His peace, and eternal life.

This is what Jesus taught us as well. Jesus taught His disciples the importance of working with fellow believers when they were overtaken in a fault, overtaken by sin. They were to show their brother or sister that what is happening in their lives is sin, and that is was a real danger to their relationship with God and endangers eternal life. If the sinner persists in sin the way the people in Hosea's day did, then it becomes necessary to make it clear that sin

has caused a separation between the individual and their Savior. Apart from Jesus there is no forgiveness, there is no salvation (Matthew 18:15-18). We call this excommunication, and it is appropriate if it is clearly evident that the sinner is entrenched in impenitence. The end goal of excommunication is exactly what the Lord expressed in our text, that sinners acknowledge their offense and earnestly seek the Lord. The hope is for repentance and restoration to the church and fellowship with their Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. *“The Lord is ... not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.”* (2 Peter 3:9).

What God holds out through His prophet is --

II. The Promise of Repentance.

Our text continues with Hosea’s plea to the people of Israel:

Hosea 6:1-3 Come, and let us return to the Lord;

For He has torn, but He will heal us;

He has stricken, but He will bind us up.

² After two days He will revive us;

On the third day He will raise us up,

That we may live in His sight.

³ Let us know,

Let us pursue the knowledge of the Lord.

His going forth is established as the morning;

He will come to us like the rain,

Like the latter *and* former rain to the earth.

Hosea understood the serious nature of sin, and the affliction that sin brings, the worst of which is eternal perdition. Hosea also understood that deliverance from such judgment is found only in repentance. Hosea understood the mercies of God. God is eager to forgive. God is eager to restore the sinner. This is true because of the greatness of God’s love. From the beginning God responded to the plight of man’s sin with the promise of grace. He promised a Savior. In the greatness of His love God sent forth His Son that we might live through Him. Hosea knew that God will raise us up if we but know the Lord, if we but pursue the knowledge of God which declares His salvation in Jesus Christ our Lord. God desires to restore His blessings upon the sinner who repents.

This is a marvelous message of grace that comes to us from a God who has been spurned and reviled, and repeatedly rebuffed by people whom He graciously has called to be His own. And yet He holds out the hope of forgiveness through repentance. Listen to the words of the prophet Isaiah.

Isaiah 1:2-3, 18 ²“Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth!

For the Lord has spoken:

“I have nourished and brought up children,
And they have rebelled against Me;

³The ox knows its owner
And the donkey its master’s crib;

But Israel does not know,
My people do not consider.” ...

¹⁸. “Come now, and let us reason together,”

Says the Lord,

“Though your sins are like scarlet,

They shall be as white as snow;

Though they are red like crimson,

They shall be as wool.

Yes, God is offended, deeply hurt by our sin, but He pleads with the sinner to repent, for with the Lord, and only with the Lord there is cleansing for all our transgressions. **God’s love is greater than our sin!**

How should we respond to such grace? Our text reveals --

III. What God Desires in a Life of Repentance.

What He does not desire is a simply recitation of the right words and going through the motions. “*Be not deceived, God is not mocked!*” (Galatians 6:7).

To misquote President Lincoln: “You can fool all of the people some of time, and some of the people all of the time,” *but you can’t fool God ever!*

Start with pursuing a knowledge of God. Understand both His power and His love, and then comprehend His wisdom for our Lives.

Acknowledge God. Recognize Jesus as Lord. Understand what that means! It isn't just a nice confession. It means that we understand that we are not our own for we were bought at a price and we are therefore glorify God in our lives (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

That means that He directs us in our lives, in the choices we make. That includes not only little choices but also big choices. We ought to acknowledge the will of God when we chose our spouse, or our vocation, or where we are going to make our homes, or regarding children, not just in how we raise them, but in how many children we may have. Those are really big things in our lives! Can we say that Jesus is Lord in the big decisions of life?

Can we say that Jesus is Lord in the little decisions of life? Are we going to church on a Sunday morning? Do we make time for home devotions or do we choose to watch TV and forget to acknowledge the Lord. How do we interact with our neighbor? Is it cold and distant except when it is for our personal convenience or gain? What movies or TV programs are we going to watch? Which books or magazines will find their way into our homes?

Jesus is Lord means that He directs our life. Life is not to be directed by our personal desires, plans or ambitions. Life should not be driven by our "need" for pleasure or recreation, or our picture of what our life should look like when we are 20, or 30 or 40 or 65 years old. It certainly should not be directed by what society, or this world's marketplace tells us we should have in our lives.

The Lord tells us that He "*desires mercy and not sacrifice, And the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.*" (v. 6:6). And so the Apostle Paul echoes this truth in Philippians 2:

Philippians 2:1-5 "Therefore if *there is* any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, ² fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, *being* of one accord, of one mind. ³ *Let* nothing *be done* through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. ⁴ Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. ⁵ Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus."

If you are thinking, I can't do that! If you are worried about how your flesh rebels against what the Lord just laid out for your life of repentance, than acknowledge your own frailty. I can't do it either. It is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure (Philippians 2:13). This is why we need to pursue the knowledge of God. We need to hear the gospel regularly because our flesh doesn't go away, the world doesn't let up on its message. Our fleshly desires and ambitions grow stronger the more we neglect the Word of the Lord, Then we may find ourselves in that empty words situation, and slip sliding away, backsliding into the ways of world, worldly thinking, not even conscious that it's happening. If we but stay in the Word the Spirit of our God will work in our hearts and lives through that Word. By the power of the Spirit we grow in grace and in knowledge of our God and Savior Jesus Christ. We grow as the Spirit takes hold of our hearts. He also takes hold of our lives, and then love and mercy toward others will appear and grow. Then those around us will see the Lord in our lives as we acknowledge Him and glorify His name in all our ways.

AMEN.

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.