**Sunday, January 24th, 2021**

**Hosea 14:1-9**

Hosea is a love story.

Actually, it is two love stories.

It is the story of Hosea's love for his wife.

And it is the story of God's love for each one of us.

In both cases the love is given even if it is not returned.

God called Hosea to be a living parable to Israel.

God loved his people in spite of their unfaithfulness.

God wanted his people to be faithful to him.

Every time we wander away from him, it causes Him great pain.

God did not want Hosea to simply tell the people what they were doing wrong.

He wanted Hosea to be a living example of how much God loved them,

          even when they were unfaithful.

So God instructed Hosea to marry a prostitute named Gomer

As the people saw Hosea's great love for a woman who was

          unfaithful to him, and embarrassed him, and shamed him,

          perhaps they could begin to see God's great love for them.

And so Hosea begins with a love story –

          a painful, personal love story.

The more Gomer went out on him, the more Hosea loved her.

He gave her everything a good wife deserved:

          his love, his home, his name, his reputation.

She responded by sleeping around with other men.

He warned her, he pleaded with her, he punished her.

She humiliated him until he wanted to cry.

Yet he still loved her, and treasured her.

Hosea warned the people of their unfaithfulness to God.

By his actions he taught them: God keeps on loving us even if we are unfaithful.

Although at times we tend to be ungrateful, faithless, and loveless toward God,

          he remains devoted to us.

Hosea's wife was not faithful to him, but Hosea kept loving her.

After a time she left him.

Later he found her in a slave market, bought her,

          and brought her back to live with him as his wife.

Hosea taught the people by the way he lived out his life.

The people had broken their covenant with God,

          and had been unfaithful to the One who loved them.

It was not simply a matter of wrong deeds and broken laws,

          more serious was their indifference to God's great love.

Yet in the face of this rejection by the people,

          God continued to love them and was willing to take them back,

          as Hosea had taken back his wife.

God illustrated his unquenchable love for His people

          through the living parable of Hosea and his unfaithful wife.

No other prophet lived out an object lesson

          with quite the same emotional force as Hosea did.

God could have simply declared,

          "Israel is like a wife to me – an adulterous wife."

Instead, he used Hosea to act out the treachery in real life,

          to show in living color God's fury, his jealousy,

          and above all else, his love for his people.

Hosea showed how the people had turned away from God,

          how they had stopped loving and being faithful to Him.

Their religion had become a religion of words and ceremonies,

          with no effect on them whatsoever.

They worshipped God with their mouths, but not with their hearts.

Yet God still loves us.

“This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time,”

          declares the Lord.

"I will put my law in their minds, and write it on their hearts.

I will be their God, and they will be my people."

Hosea urged the people to repent and turn back to God.

But even when we turn away from God,

          He does not wait for us to come back to him.

He pursues us, He calls us, and urges us to turn back to Him.

"If my people, who are called by my name,

          will humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face

          and turn from their wicked ways,

          then I will hear from heaven,

          and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land."

For thirteen chapters the prophet Hosea told the nation Israel

          about what was going to happen to them

          if they did not repent and turn back to God.

He forecasted failure,

          he declared doom,

                    he talked of all the terrible things which would happen.

But in the last chapter he spoke of God's ultimate intention.

He described what our God really wants to do for his people.

He spoke of healing our hurts and fears.

He described the nation as flourishing like a beautiful garden.

Hosea spoke of new hope and abundant life when we turn back to God.

AMEN