

2026-05-03 Hosea – God uses the remnant

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Intro –

Nobody wanted to be a prophet... remember? Being a prophet meant you had bad news to deliver, which meant you likely had a target on your back and you had no friends. The people had been disappointing God again – or still – and they needed correction again – still.

Hosea was preaching to the same people, at about the same time and about the same issues as Amos. Both prophets were primarily preaching to the people in the northern kingdom of Israel but they graciously included Judah in the south as well. They started preaching just a few decades before Israel fell in 722 B.C.E. As I mentioned a couple weeks ago, it was a time of great prosperity – for the ruling class. But the nations of Israel and Judah as a whole were full of injustice – the rich kept getting richer on the backs of the poor, the leaders (both political and religious) were *not* caring for the widows or the orphans – those who were specifically assigned to be under their care. They were doing everything BUT that! They were worshiping other gods, making themselves sick with greed, making back alley deals, quid pro quo, with the leaders of other nations... in order to maintain and advance their own power. Now Amos, you might remember, had hard words of judgment and warning about what God would do if the people didn't wake up, turn around, and start behaving in the ways they knew God expected them to – in ways that honored the covenant – treating all people with justice and respect, caring for those who needed help, showing God's love by their actions. Hosea had some harsh words too. But his method, his style of prophesying was completely different than Amos' or, really anyone else's. God called Hosea to a particularly unique prophetic task. Hosea's prophecy was like one, long role-play in which Hosea was demonstrating – with his LIFE – the message from God.

Here's the cliff notes version of the story of Hosea:

- God asked Hosea to marry a woman named Gomer who behaved like a prostitute. She delighted in having relationships with other men. She was NOT a faithful wife to Hosea. This heartbreaking scenario was to demonstrate the relationship between God and Israel. The “marriage covenant” was badly and repeatedly broken by Israel's “prostituting” itself to other nations and other gods. Yahweh wanted Hosea to FEEL and SHOW the pain of repeated betrayal and broken promises so that Hosea could adequately express that pain to the people.
- Of course, with those kinds of experiences there's lots of anger, some harsh language that includes warnings (or threats, one could say), and ultimatums.
- There are the three children for Hosea and Gomer. All three of the children's names (and therefore their identities) are symbolic of God's perspective... Jezreel first.
 - o Jezreel means “God plants”. The Jezreel Valley still exists – as it did in Hosea's day! It's in northern Israel and it's an incredibly fertile and lush place where lots of farming happens. It's known as the “breadbasket” of northern Israel – a bit like how Kansas is known in the U.S.! But the Jezreel Valley is also a place of horrific and brutal wars and murders. So the Jezreel Valley, along with being fertile and lush is also stained with blood – all through Bible times and until now. When I googled “What is currently happening in the Jezreel Valley”, I got this: “Currently, the Jezreel Valley is experiencing heightened security activity,

including air defense interceptions of missiles. The region features agricultural activity, historical excavation sites, and significant traffic, with recent fatal traffic incidents and emergency responses. The area is heavily influenced by surrounding regional conflicts and ongoing military operations in the region.” The Jezreel Valley is also known as the Valley of Armageddon or Megiddo. Jezreel is a place of rich promise and hope as well as deep grief and brokenness.

- The second child, a daughter, was to be named “No Compassion” because, God said, “I will no longer have compassion on Israel, but I WILL have compassion on Judah. God vowed to save Judah – but not with violence, with bow or sword or war or horses. They’re gonna have to trust that Yahweh will save them, albeit in some unconventional and unexpected ways... a preview of the prophet Jesus coming into the world with unconventional and upside-down ways of doing things.
 - And finally, the third child, another boy. This one to be called “Not My People” because, well clearly... God said, your behavior is showing me and the world that “You are not my people and I am not your God.”
- The chapters between 1 and 14, that Justine read, contain the rest of the agonizing stories of promises made and broken, and God’s unrelenting love that keeps returning and trying and reaching out and offering restoration and being betrayed, angry, sorrowful, threatening... but steadfast in commitment, even as Israel (and Judah) were steadfast in their lack of commitment. Hosea’s life was a flesh-and-blood, real, earthly, public example of God’s experiences with Israel. This was the people-group who had been chosen to be God’s Light to all the nations and God asked Hosea to “act out” the pain of their betrayal.
 - The people were prospering – doing well economically and even gaining some stature in the midst of the surrounding nations because they were worshiping their gods and acclimating to their cultural mores, becoming more “like those around them” and less “set apart” and living out God’s peculiar vision for the world.
 - The people called their prosperity “blessings”; they abandoned gratitude to God and lived as if they had “earned” and thus “deserved” all the bounty and goodness they had. They forgot that everything belongs to God, comes from God as a gift, and out of love, is returned to God. They forgot the covenant. They forgot the commandments. And they forgot (if they ever knew) how hard it is to trust a God that can’t be seen or touched but who is always present, always watching, always hoping and longing for that mutual respect, trust and steadfast love.

Now. What does our resident author and theologian have to say about Hosea? In a nutshell, Richard Rohr says that God has always worked through a very small number of people who actually “get it”, who actually receive and understand and absorb God’s unwavering love – and then try to describe and live it out, try to BE God’s Light in the world. It’s a very small group. But God’s idea of a “critical mass” is not very many. For example:

- When two or more are gathered in my name, there I am, among them, Matthew 18:20
- Out of the stump of Jesse new life will emerge, Isaiah 11:1

- “The surviving remnant of the House of Judah shall bring forth new roots below and fruits above. For a remnant shall go out from Jerusalem, and survivors from Mount Zion. The jealous love of Yahweh Almighty will achieve this.” Isaiah 37:31-32

Here’s what Richard Rohr says about this ‘remnant’: “Over and over in the OT, we see that Yahweh works slowly and humbly to reform any society, starting from the edges and the bottom. It is the consistent biblical theme of themes. The victims are the victors.” He goes on, “I’m not sure how explicitly the prophets understood this seeming divine strategy, but they certainly learned to work inside of littleness, failure, and rejection from a nonresponsive audience. In this way, the... authentic gathering of the people of God emerges by a divine winnowing process. The whole group never gets the message, but a smaller group (the “remnant”) carries the love and hope of restoration forward after each purification (that is, after the trials and tribulations the people endure). This seems intentional on God’s part. Power distorts truth, so God plants and develops it at the edge, where the power-hungry least expect it. The truth will always be too much for everybody, but God seems content with a few getting the point in each era. The God of the prophets is very patient and very humble...” And here’s the heart of it:

“This tradition of the remnant is central to the whole Bible. God’s message and messengers... all tend to be outliers to ‘the way everybody thinks.’ ... I would venture so far as to say that if we had only learned this one message, we could have avoided much of the suffering of human history. Centuries of religious wars could have been prevented if we had sought the truth at every edge instead of in glorified institutions...” Rohr continues, “Throughout Scripture, Yahweh’s willingness to continue to work with ‘the few who get it’ forces Israel to constantly rethink its own theology of salvation... The ‘remainder’ becomes a standing symbol of how little it takes for God to stay with us. Yet those who are often called ‘the chosen’ or the ‘elect’ are chosen NOT because of God’s actual favoritism toward them, but because of their radical trust in God’s universal, non-punitive, and unconditional love for them (and for everyone)... God is saving all of history and all of humanity, but only with the direct, conscious help of a faithful few (humans).”

Rohr writes, “Yahweh commanded the prophet Hosea to marry a prostitute so that Hosea could learn that love and mercy apply even when love is not reciprocated. Hosea is told to keep loving his wife, Gomer, despite her many adulteries, so he can understand at a bodily level God’s love for Israel in her unworthiness. Here Yahweh needs to get Hosea to literally put some skin in the game, to see what both love and adultery feel like!”

He continues, “This revelation of the remnant is the clear opposite of our notion of majority rule, authority rule, Christendom, or even of ‘one person, one vote’. In a very clear way, (remnant theology) presents an utterly counterintuitive theme that a humble minority is always the critical stand-in for God’s big truth – and the group through which God is working change. In nineteenth-century America, for example, the Black enslaved understood the liberating gospel, while the white minority (who had most of the wealth and power) created an exclusivist, imperial belief system that could barely be called Christianity. This privileged form of white Christianity survives to this day and is still racist, materialistic, and largely preoccupied with (its) small self... The critical mass in biblical theology is always the small, ‘edgy’ group that carries history forward almost in spite of the whole group. This is how remnant theology works.” I mean,

consider who was called: Noah and his family on the ark, Moses who couldn't speak and needed Aaron and Miriam's help, the youngest and forgotten son David becoming king, the barren wives Sarah and Elizabeth, the motley group of 12 that Jesus gathered to be his disciples, the women who stayed faithful through it all and never stopped believing, who were the first to be entrusted with the resurrection news.

Rohr writes, "Christianity always becomes what we now call civil religion, where the powerful assume they have authority of the truth, simply because they are in power. Popular thinking is given the presumption of orthodoxy. But the prophets consistently laugh at the supposedly normal and parody the so-called successful..."

Who might be considered the "remnant" today? Rohr makes the point that remnant folks are often difficult to identify while they're in our midst. By definition, they're the ones we may not think of or notice or pay much attention to. They're generally on the margins, not necessarily in the spotlight and they often seem "out of step", not in the mainstream, or popular. Like the prophets, we often don't appreciate the wisdom of the remnants until they're gone and with 20/20 hindsight we can see that they "got it" and their perspectives were closer to God's heart than we knew.

Rohr says that "Hosea wanted us to learn that our core mistake is that we do not know Yahweh. We do not recognize how God has been patient and forgiving with us, nor have we learned how divine love operates. In the absence of a vital spiritual experience, we presume a universal reward- punishment logic. But for the prophets, and particularly Hosea, God's unconditional love is the hallmark, the ideal, and the model for all human behavior reaching its epitome in the teachings of Jesus." By the grace of God, may we be part of the remnant who is used by God to show the world God's unexpected and unrelenting Love.