

Text: Hosea 5:15-6:3

¹⁵ 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.” ^{6:1}“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. ² After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will restore us, that we may live in his presence. ³ 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.” – NIV84

Prayer of the Day:

Almighty God, we confess that we deserve to be punished for our evil deeds. But we ask you graciously to cleanse us from all sin and to comfort us with your salvation; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Verse of the Day:

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16)

Sermon Text:

Well, Hi! I'm going to go ahead and say all of this is well, a little weird. I have never preached a sermon to my cellphone before, never visited the CDC website which now claims to be my "go to viewing spot" according to my search list, never had my heart race a beat or two when one of my family members sneezed or God forbid coughed, never had hands as dry as they are from constant cleaning, never wondered so much about what tomorrow would bring. Things are well, a little weird these days.

So I'm guessing that the Old Testament Lesson this week jumped out at you a little bit. It sure did to me. I'm going to back up another two verses through and read those words again. ¹³ *"When Ephraim saw his sickness, and Judah his sores, then Ephraim turned to Assyria, and sent to the great king for help. But he is not able to cure you, not able to heal your sores."* ¹⁴ *"For I will be like a lion to Ephraim, like a great lion to Judah. I will tear them to pieces and go away; I will carry them off, with no one to rescue them."* ¹⁵ *"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."* ^{6:1} *"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. ² After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will restore us, that we may live in his presence. ³ 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."*

A few things before we dive into the words of our God set before us. It is very easy for us to jump to the conclusion that God is after us for our sin. There are certainly plenty of them which we can point to. More often than not, we like to point at the sins of others that have generally eluded us. When we do this we will end up sounding like the disciples before Jesus in John 9, *His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life* (John 9:2-3). So in all seriousness, maybe God is disciplining us or maybe God is presenting an opportunity. Chapter and verse have not told me what God is doing at this exact moment in history.

But back to the thoughts of our text. This is really a lesson about repentance and a rather poignant one at that. You see Israel had turned from God. It's nothing overly new. It happens regularly in the course of the life of the little nation of God's chosen people. Neither is the discipline. Think of the time

of the judges and regular cycle of sin, oppression, repentance, and deliverance. But this time is a little different.

You see Israel, decided that they could treat God like an ATM. When your out of money just go punch the right sequence of numbers into the pad and tumbles out of the slot. I can remember doing this often as a child. If one gets into trouble well just spit out the words, I'm sorry," even if they are half-hearted and everything is supposed to be okay. Right!?!

God's answer comes to his people in the Words directly following our lesson. ⁴ *"What can I do with you, Ephraim? What can I do with you, Judah? Your love is like the morning mist, like the early dew that disappears. ⁵ Therefore I cut you in pieces with my prophets, I killed you with the words of my mouth; my judgments flashed like lightning upon you. ⁶ For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings* (Hosea 6:3-6). God, it turns out can see the heart and the knows the thoughts and attitudes of the mind. He's looking for faith not action, the attitude of the heart that reflects it "mercy, not sacrifice."

Kind of a scary lesson isn't it. I suppose it really would be if this is all we had to say about it. After all, I know my heart. I know the sin that regularly rages within it. I know that God should do far worse than tear me to pieces or lock me up in a pretty comfy house while pandemic rages around me. But this is not all God has to say here.

Israel wasn't wrong! At least on the face of the thing. You see the God who requires mercy and not sacrifice is the one who willingly gives us both. He is the one who heals us and binds up our wounds. He is the one who revives us and take a look at this, *"on the third day he will restore us, that we may live in his presence."*

As Israel spoke these words, they meant the physical problems of the world around them: defeat in war, catastrophe in the world of their day. The real problem was that they completely overlooked their sinfulness. The missed the point of what God was doing all together. We have the blessing of history fulfilled and the clarity of hindsight to show us that.

We also have the blessing of seeing the fulfillment of God's deliverance. No, not in the physical restoration of a nation or people, but in the eternal victory granted by our Savior Jesus. You see for our sin, Jesus was torn to pieces, and injured. Isaiah would pen those words of prophesy later fulfilled on the cross, ⁴ *Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. ⁵ But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. ⁶ We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all* (Isaiah 53:4-6). Jesus would give up his final breath, not because of some world wrecking disease but because he would take on the full weight of our sin and die for it on the cross and on the third day, He would rise, that we might live in His presence forever. This is mercy, shown to us in the sacrifice of God's Son. It's everything God wanted and it's done for us. There is nothing left to do, God's not out to get us. He got us on the cross.

So dear Christian, whether in good times or bad, in the pandemonium of pandemic or in the peace of prosperity, ³ *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."* I really don't know what tomorrow holds. If I used to pretend, recent events have taught that lesson well, again everything is just weird and I'm still trying to figure it out with you. But I do know this, my sin has been paid for in Christ and better days will come! If not here on earth, then in the home of heaven and that grants strength and purpose dear friends. Strength to stand up in a weird world wrapped in God's mercy and a purpose that we might acknowledge Him in a world, that looks like it needs Him now more than ever. Amen.