

## **“Accepting Whom God Forgives”**

Message by DD Adams

2<sup>nd</sup> SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

HOLY COMMUNION SUNDAY

Kempton Providence UM Church

June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2018

The Old Testament lesson is from Hosea, chapter 2, verses 14 through 20.

“Therefore, I will charm her, and bring her into the desert, and speak tenderly to her heart. From there I will give her vineyards, and make the Achor Valley a door of hope. There she will respond to me as in the days of her youth, like the time when she came out of the land of Egypt.

On that day, says the Lord, you will call me, “My husband,” and no longer will you call me, “My Lord.” I will take away the names of the Baals from her mouth, and they will not be mentioned by name anymore. On that day, I will make a covenant for them with the wild animals, the birds in the sky, and the creeping creatures of the fertile ground.

I will do away with the bow, the sword, and war from the land; I will make you lie down in safety. I will take you for my wife forever; I will take you for my wife in righteousness and in justice, in devoted love, and in mercy. I will take you for my wife in faithfulness; and you will know the Lord.

The epistle lesson is from 2 Corinthians, chapter 3, verses 1 through 6. Are we starting to commend ourselves again? We don't need letters of introduction to

you or from you like other people, do we? You are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everyone. You show that you are Christ's letter, delivered by us. You weren't written with ink but with the Spirit of the living God. You weren't written on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.

This is the confidence that we have through Christ in the presence of God. It isn't that we ourselves are qualified to claim that anything came from us. No, our qualification is from God. He has qualified us as ministers of a new covenant, not based on what is written but on the Spirit, because what is written kills, but the Spirit gives life.

The gospel lesson is from the book of Mark, chapter 2, verses 13 through 22. Jesus went out beside the lake again. The whole crowd came to him, and he began to teach them. As he continued along, he saw Levi, Alphaeus' son, sitting at a kiosk for collecting taxes. Jesus said to him, "Follow me." Levi got up and followed him.

Jesus sat down to eat at Levi's house. Many tax collectors and sinners were eating with Jesus and his disciples. Indeed, many of them had become his followers. When some of the legal experts from among the Pharisees saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors, they asked his disciples, "Why is he eating with sinners and tax collectors?"

When Jesus heard it, he said to them, “Healthy people don’t need a doctor, but sick people do. I didn’t come to call righteous people, but sinners.” John’s disciples and the Pharisees had a habit of fasting. Some people asked Jesus, “Why do John’s disciples and the Pharisees’ disciples fast, but yours don’t?”

Jesus said, “The wedding guests can’t fast while the groom is with them, can they? As long as they have the groom with them, they can’t fast. But the days will come when the groom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast.

“No one sews a piece of new, unshrunk cloth on old clothes; otherwise, the patch tears away from it, the new from the old, and makes a worse tear. No one pours new wine into old leather wineskins; otherwise, the wine would burst the wineskins and the wine would be lost and the wineskins destroyed. But new wine is for new wineskins.” This is God’s word for God people.

Please pray with me. God of love and forgiveness, we pray your blessing on the reading, hearing, understanding, and the doing of your word here today. In Christ’s name pray. Amen. Peace be with you.

Who is it we receive and accept into our “circle of friends”? . . . The circle should be wide because Jesus’ circle was very wide. This is what the message is all about today. Here’s the crux and the heart of it. If Jesus accepts, forgives, and chooses someone will we? Can sinners feel comfortable around others who call themselves faithful? Surely notorious and shady folks are among us here today.

Jesus said this concerning sinners, “Healthy people don’t need a doctor, but sick people do. I didn’t come to call righteous people, but sinners” (Mk 2:17b). Still we say, but not that one, they aren’t the example we expect them to be! Listen.

Hosea was an 8th-century minor prophet and ministered 60 years. Looking at his family we see some pretty shady characters. Hosea married a woman named Gomer. She had a notorious reputation for unfaithfulness and harlotry. Her children’s names were Lo-rukhamah which means “no mercy,” Lo-ammi means “not my people,” and the oldest was Jezreel. You can imagine the gossip about this family and the slanderous chatter that went on in the community.

Gomer, a true character in Scripture, is a picture of Israel. Israel was repeatedly worshipping foreign gods, and of course, God felt betrayed. God’s response to Gomer was that He always forgave and loved her and each time took her back into relationship. Looking at your family, do you experience members of your family that abandon God, curse your name and reject you and God?

Fact is, Hosea repeatedly received Gomer back and loved her. Verse 16 shows Gomer receiving God’s grace and calling Hosea “My husband.” In other words, God plans to continuously win Israel back and Israel responds. God is doing what He can to restore His people in relationship to himself.

In Second Corinthians we find the apostle Paul, previously named Saul, being rejected and persecuted after he was converted by Christ. No one trusted him

as a disciple! Saul ravaged the church, took them to jail, and watched as Stephen was stoned to death while he held the coats of those throwing the stones. The disciples who followed Christ had some real trouble embracing Paul as a Christian. God seemed to be the only one who vouched for him.

In Mark's gospel, we see Jesus in conversation and eating dinner with Levi or rather Matthew the tax collector. Levi was hated among Jews because tax collectors were known to take more than someone owed and keep it for them self. Now we see Jesus receiving and eating with Matthew because he left his vocation immediately and became a disciple and follower of Christ!

I can hear in my mind . . . "Okay, please, NOT Matthew. Look at the sinner's crimes. I'm so sick and tired of Matthew and how he's able to continue to be with Jesus and serve him." . . . Now wait, we know God takes our sin and removes it as far as the east is from the west, but wait a minute, this time Jesus is going *too far!* *Nope, you stand corrected.* The same grace that forgave your sin is the same grace that forgave Matthew known as Levi, Saul who became Paul the apostle, and Gomer the harlot who became faithful.

Levi, who became Matthew even had an entire tribe of men whom God set aside to care for the temple and the holy things of God! In Mark's gospel, we can see that John's disciples and the Pharisees had a habit of fasting. Some people

asked Jesus, “Why do John’s disciples and the Pharisees’ disciples fast, but yours don’t?” Jesus said, “Fresh skins are for new wine!” That’s food for thought!

Jesus calls everyone to repentance. And hearing the Scriptures today, you should agree, we all sin, we all need forgiveness and acceptance, and if you’re not a sinner, I’m not sure why you’re here. The community of faith, which we are, shouldn’t disdain sinners because we’re sinners too.

We should be present here in this house of worship to pray together for we are the church. It’s the Holy Spirit that continues to make us into a new people, bound together in love, and devoted in prayer to God with each other. It’s through prayer we realize we are a faith community! In encourage you, accept one another, prayer for one another, and ask God to advance the kingdom as we all move closer to each other and to God.

Please pray with me. God make us a community grounded on faith and your living word. Let our worship together *be a discipline* we offer to you as we pray. Let it empower us to be a genuine community of faith that embraces all people, made free by God’s grace. In Christ’s name we pray. Amen.