



**Saint John United Methodist Church**  
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**Message for June 6, 2021**  
**“Majoring in the Minors: Mercy”**  
**Speaker: Pastor Tom Grieb**  
**Scripture: Hosea 6:1-6**

## **Majoring in the Minors**

I am excited about our next sermon series. We will be studying the so-called Minor Prophets.

There is nothing minor about the Minor Prophets. They speak with authority and are just as relevant today as the day they first spoke. The Minor Prophets are simply shorter in length, that’s all, as compared to Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, and Ezekiel.

Do not be fooled by the relative brevity of the Minor Prophets. They have much to offer, particularly given the times in which we live. For instance, the Minor Prophets have much to say about acting justly. They speak clearly about treating all people with respect and dignity. They hold our feet to the fire when it comes to self-righteousness.

In a word, the Minor Prophets don’t pull any punches when it comes to the importance of maintaining a right relationship with God, which then leads to a right relationship with other people.

Over the years, I have found that the summer lends itself well to a corporate Bible study. I am convinced that our study of the twelve Minor Prophets will be no exception. Let me encourage you not only to consider the particular passage we will read each week, but the entire book from which that passage comes.

Well, let’s get to it. Let’s kick off this series by reading from the Book of Hosea. Today we read from Hosea 6:1-6.

### **Hosea 6:1-6**

*“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.  
After two days he will revive us;  
on the third day he will restore us,  
that we may live in his presence.  
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.”*

*“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.  
Therefore I cut you in pieces with my prophets,  
I killed you with the words of my mouth—  
then my judgments go forth like the sun.<sup>[a]</sup>  
For I desire mercy, not sacrifice,  
and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings.*

### **Challenging Words Indeed**

Those are challenging words indeed.

At first, the word here is one of encouragement. Upon returning to the Lord, healing takes place, injuries are bound up, lives are restored, the work of the Lord falls like a spring rain. Eventually though the question comes, *“What am I going to do with you?”*

*“Your love and is fickle. You are with me one moment and not the next. You are much more into being religious than being in relationship.”*

Can you relate? God has a way of hitting us over the head with a 2x4 sometimes.

### **A Word about Hosea**

Hosea prophesied during the middle of the 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C. He was from the Northern Kingdom of Israel. He knew that dark clouds loomed, if for no other reason, because the people were not following God as they should.

They were good about keeping appearances when it came to religion, but not so good when it came to obedience. In fact, they got so far off track that they were quick to chase after other gods.

The Book of Hosea opens with a love story. It's not one you would expect though. If you read Hosea 1-3 you would expect that love story to play out on the cover of some grocery store tabloid. It is a bit racy, to say the least.

Hosea is commanded to marry a harlot, a common prostitute. He is also commanded to have children with her. His wife's name is Gomer and, as you might guess, she was quite unfaithful. I told you this was the stuff for a grocery store tabloid.

Hosea remained faithful though, just like God does with us, which is the message Hosea wants to get across. God loves us in just this way. He goes after us even at our worst. He keeps after us. He loves us when we are unable to define love, much less live it out.

### **Nobodies Became Somebodies**

I am particularly taken by what the prophet writes about the children born to Hosea and Gomer. He says that those who were considered *“nobodies”* became *“somebodies.”*

The Apostle Paul references this in Romans 9:25 referring to Christ's work in reconciling us to God.

From *The Message* we read, “I’ll call nobodies and make them somebodies; I’ll call the unloved and make them beloved. In the place where they yelled out, ‘You’re nobody!’ they’re call you, ‘God’s living children.’” (Romans 9:25 *The Message*)

## **A Prophet of Love**

Hosea is often called *A Prophet of Love*. Hosea is of the firm mind, that despite how much we mess things up, God still loves us. God’s love permeates all of life. Just like we talked a few weeks ago regarding hope, love, is both a noun and a verb.

God is all love. Love is who God is, and God is actively at work to share that love. God loves us to no end. Love is both a noun and a verb when it comes to God.

I John 4:8 puts it simply, “*God is love.*”

If you read very much of Hosea, you will soon recognize that there is a lot of “*tough love*” on God’s part. Like a parent who is angry with a wayward child God is angry with his people. He still loves them though. He is no less loving with us.

Even the exile that the people of the Northern Kingdom suffered at the hands of the Assyrians is an expression of tough love, and believe me, it was tough. All along, though, God was at work to bring about his good purposes.

As we said earlier, God eventually brought healing, bound up their wounds, and restored them so they could live in his presence. God’s love showered upon them, and they eventually returned to their rightful place as the children of God.

## **HESED**

The Hebrew word, HESED, is used liberally in the Book of Hosea. It is best translated, “*lovingkindness*” or “*mercy.*” God’s lovingkindness and mercy extended our way enables us then to share the same with those around us.

Kindness is in short supply these days. I have been so thankful for the young people in our own neighborhood who have made yard signs available to remind us to “*Be Kind.*”

Being kind has a way of weaving its way into the fabric of life if enough people get involved. It starts though with one person catching the spark and passing it along. More far-reaching, it comes down to individuals opening themselves to the lovingkindness of the Lord and then passing it along.

It’s a fact. God loves us first and in that we find ourselves better able to love not only to him, but to those around us.

I pray for the day when lovingkindness is a cultural thing. That will only happen though as we get ourselves out of the way and let God do his thing. I pray for revival where people all around the world open themselves to God’s lovingkindness. Only then will the dark clouds of hatred so prevalent today turn to a much brighter day.

Mercy functions in much the same way. When we experience mercy, we are at a much better place to be merciful. Jesus himself said, “*Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.*” (*Matthew 5:7*)

Mercy begets mercy. It is the way of God for each of us.

*“For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings.”* (Hosea 6:6)

Hosea spoke a clear word both to his time and to ours about religion getting in the way of relationship. The people in his day were all about checking the boxes when it came to sacrifices and burnt offering, yet they missed the boat when it came to extending mercy and lovingkindness.

They had played “*foot/lose*” with God for far too long. They traded obedience for appearances, relationship for self-righteousness. They missed the mark so much that they even chased after other gods. They were so blinded by their self-righteousness that they could no longer discern right from wrong, godliness from wickedness.

Hosea spoke to that sort of thing in no uncertain terms, and dare we say he continues to speak to this day?

### **Relationship on the Vertical and Horizontal Plain**

Hosea does a great job calling us to right relationship with God first and with others second.

Jesus does the same. He is all about us having a right relationship with God, and from that being in the right place to go on and be in right relationship with others.

Jesus is all about love, love that loves no matter how tough it is to love.

Jesus is all about mercy. As mercy is extended our way, so we should extend it to others.

Jesus is all about lovingkindness. We are a people of the Golden Rule, after all.

*“So, in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you.”* (Matthew 7:12)

The cross illustrates this wonderfully. Relationship is struck on both the vertical and horizontal plain. Let's recognize that just now as we celebrate the real presence of Christ on the vertical plain and our love for each other on the horizontal plain as we partake of this Holy Sacrament.