

SERMON
 First Lutheran Church
 Aitkin, Minnesota
 November 15, 2015

Hosea 11: 1-9
 Mark 10: 13-14
 Rev. Darrell J. Pedersen

CHILDREN'S MESSAGE

Kids, please use your bodies/faces to show me what it means to be "**stubborn**." (Shaking head "no," stomping feet, pouting look, arms crossed.) Now show me what it means to be "**loving/caring**." (Shaking head "yes," smile, extended arms, hug, helping hand.)

Now I need two groups. This group will pretend they are loving parents and this group will pretend they are stubborn kids.

Parents: (loving/caring)

1. I could help you with that.
2. After you clean your room, we can go swimming together.
3. I cleaned and cooked some nice corn from our garden.
4. Please let your brother play with some of the Matchbox cars I just gave you.

Kids: (stubborn)

1. I don't need any help!
2. No, I won't clean my room!
3. I don't want any vegetables!
4. They're mine! He can play with his own toys!

That's enough of that. **Parents**, how did this make you feel? Awful? **Kids**, how did this make you feel? Not so good? Do you kids treat your parents like that? If you did, how would they feel? Your parents love and care for you in every way. Without them, you would be in big trouble. **How do you think your parents would like you to treat them?** (Love, respect, kindness, politeness, appreciation...)

Kids, we are **God's children too**. God made us. God gives us our families to love and care for us. God gives us this amazing world to live in. God gives us all the stuff we love to do. God even gives us God self. Jesus even dies for us so that nobody will ever be able to take us away from God and God's love for us. How do you think **God would like to be treated by us?** (Love, respect, kindness, worship, prayer, appreciation.)

Will your **parents stop loving you if you treat them badly?** No. **Amazing parents.** **Will God stop loving you if you treat God badly?** No. **Even more amazing God.** **Do you love God?** **Good!** Amen.

ADULT MESSAGE

God set everything up so well. It was a little before 6:00 a.m. There was a hint of light on the eastern horizon but a sliver of moon still shone brightly. Orion, the Hunter, looked down on me from the dark sky overhead. It was last Monday as I sat perched sixteen feet above the ground in my deer stand. Before long the sun topped the trees. I heard geese honking as they rose from a nearby pond. Across the way cows mooed, crows called and a noisy machine began to harvest bright yellow corn cobs. The night creatures bedded down. The day critters came alive.

God set everything up so well. What an abundant world we live in. Countless spider webs glittered in the bright sun rays. A chickadee tried to land on my head. Blue Jays and wood peckers drifted in and out of my sight. Nuthatches darted back and forth from a nearby gut pile. By 8:00 a.m. I had bagged my own spiked buck. The county land we hunt on, once logged off, is now regenerating into a beautiful forest. The circle of life was unfolding around me. **What an abundant world we live in.**

Before climbing down to gut my deer, I bowed my head and offered a prayer of thanksgiving to God for the gift of this beautiful and nutritious animal. I wasn't thanking God for bringing the deer by me, or for awakening me at the right moment, or for aiming my gun properly. No, I was **thanking God for God's marvelous creation** and for the **amazing balance of nature** between deer, birds, trees, water, air, humans and earth.

I live in the midst of God's amazing abundance. The next day, as I sat in that same stand, a giant military transport rumbled by just above the tree tops. I thought about the good fortune that I have to be living in the United States, where so many people have given life and limb to provide the freedom, justice and abundance that we all have an opportunity to share together here and with the world beyond.

That's why God can't understand us. When we decide that we don't need God. That there really is no God. That we can take perfectly good care of ourselves without God's help.

Sooner or later, sitting in that remote deer stand, it always happens to me. Away from the frantic rush of my everyday work and responsibilities, **I stop**

and talk to God. I roll out my grocery list of blessings and start to thank God. The woods. The deer stand. My wife. My kids. My folks. Brothers and sisters, nieces and nephews, friends. My work. Our home. The writing that I so love to do. Myself, being alive – having a heart, mind and soul. God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. God with us. God’s love. Grace. Compassion. Eternal life.

I’ve been hunting with Sid Johnson and my son, John, for over twenty years. Once young, in good shape and with my body working well, hunting was easier. This season, arthritis in my joints, muscles far out of tone, vision and hearing on the decline, easily winded – I move more slowly. There is still a kid running around inside of me, behind my eyes. But, someday I plan to be the life of the party in the nursing home. Even should I suffer from Alzheimer’s, God will provide loving people to faithfully care for me. And on my last day, God will bring me to share in God’s eternal life and home. **That’s why God can’t understand us. When we forget God.**

God invites all people to live and thrive in God’s love and abundance now and forever. God entrusts the whole creation into our care. God invites us to trust God with our lives and all that we have. God invites us to use God’s gifts wisely, and to share them. God loves us in so many ways. And God longs for us to love God back. Just like any loving parent hopes that their children will love them. God doesn’t need us. We need God.

That’s why God so grieves when we don’t love God back. In our text for today, the prophet **Hosea** reveals God as a totally loving parent – giving God’s people life, carrying the precious little ones in God’s arms, feeding them, rescuing from trouble, healing their wounds, holding them close to God’s own face. Yet, God’s people, God’s children, again and again, run off on their own. They forget faithful, loving God and instead go whoring after false gods that only lead to their destruction. The more God calls them, the more they rebel against God. They can’t even see that it is God who has given them life and every good gift. **Do you see that in your life? Can you see loving God there for you every moment of every day?**

By the time of **Hosea**, God has grown so weary and grieved by Israel’s constant flight from God that **God seems to give up.** God is talking about practicing **tough love** with his precious children. If they don’t want me to be their God, I will let them follow their passions. Then they’ll see the

hurtful consequences of trying to live in my world without depending upon my love and care. You heard the result of Israel trying to be their own god – **scheming, false prophets and wars**. God says, **“My people are bent on turning away from me. To the Most High they call, but he does not raise them up at all.”** And the God who loved, rescued and healed them so many times before **went silent**. God did **not respond to their prayers**. God waited, **painfully suffering to witness the destruction** that their **self-pride, arrogance and selfishness brought upon them**. This happens again and again throughout the Old Testament.

Our view of ourselves is so small when we forget God. We can do so little without God. We are so vulnerable when we try to be our own god. But with our hand in God’s hand, our view of ourselves is magnified. When we see how precious we are to God, we see ourselves as more precious. Hand in hand with God, the depth and richness of our lives increases dramatically. God sees more in us than we see in ourselves. Through the eyes of the world, we can see only **scarcity - I won’t have enough**. Through the eyes of God we can see amazing **abundance – I have everything I need**. You saw it in our Gospel lesson, **Mark 10:13-14**. People were bringing their children to Jesus for a blessing. In those days children counted for nothing. They were considered worthless unless they were the first born male. So Jesus’ disciples tried to chase them away, to prevent them from bothering important Jesus. When Jesus saw it he was indignant and said, **“Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs.”** **People** saw **children as worthless**. **Jesus** saw them as **precious**.

How much do you love your kids? How far will you let them go? Don’t you try to protect them from hurting themselves? Are there times when kids need to experience the consequences of bad decisions? How much do you love your kids? Do your kids love you back? I’d like to think that even if one of my kids became a mass murderer, I’d still love them. **Would you?**

In the first part of our text from Hosea, God is ready to throw in the towel on his rebellious, selfish kids. But by the end of our text, God says, **“How can I give you up...? How can I hand you over...? My heart recoils within me; my compassion grows warm and tender. I will not execute my fierce anger; I will not again destroy (my people;) for I am God and no mortal, the Holy One in your midst, and I will not come in wrath.”** God doesn’t want to see God’s children destroyed. God loves and wants to give

us life. **That is why God can't understand when we don't want anything to do with God.** We accept all of God's amazing gifts to us. Then we forget who gave them to us. We think that we don't need God. We think that we are god. And then we try to face the world alone.

Thankfully, God isn't willing to let that happen. We don't change, but God changes. Thankfully God, not because of any good thing that we have done, God chooses to come again to love us. God can't bear to turn away from us. God swallows God's disappointment and anger and comes again to woo, rescue and bring us home.

God's love for children didn't start when Jesus came. God's love is clear in this text from hundreds of years before Jesus walked this earth. But God's love for God's people became even clearer in Jesus. In **Hosea**, God our **Parent** suffers the pain of our rejection and mistakes. Finally, by the time of Jesus, God can't bear it any longer. God can't wait another minute for us to come to God. God, in Christ, takes on human flesh and comes to us.

Then in **Jesus**, God our **Brother** suffers the pain of our rejection, mistakes, betrayal, denial, hiding, shouts of "crucify," nails driven by our own hands, spear piercing his side. This is the One who said, "**Let the little children come to me...**"

I've been present at many death beds. On that last day, all the stuff becomes unimportant. All the world's distractions fade away. On that last day, all that matters is that somebody loves you and you love them. All that matters is that God loves you and you love God. If you have those **treasures**, love of God and of others, you have **abundant life** right now.

The best good news of our **word from God in Hosea** and from **Jesus on the cross** is not the stuff we enjoy, or even of the amazing people in our lives. The **best good news** is of **God present in our lives**. And the **best good news of all** is that **God is compassionate, loving, forgiving and never tires of being our God**. **Despite our poor response**, our failure to love and trust God everyday – **God keeps loving and caring for us**.

The creation is so amazing around us. We have been blessed with so many beautiful family members, friends and all those folks necessary for our well-being. We have so many things that make our lives more enjoyable. God set everything up so well. **Each of us has such a small**

part to play on the world's giant stage, yet, in the eyes of God, nobody matters more than you do. Do you have just the littlest notion of how much God loves you? Then you have a taste of abundant life.

We have a God who loves us to the death and back and forever.

Abundance. Ours. From God. Today we have another chance to love God back. Thanks be to God. Amen.