Hosea 16:1-3 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.”

Did the words of this text, this Old Testament reading sound familiar? It should have. It should have because we just heard this reading and had a sermon on it for Lent 4. That would have been the weekend of March 26th. I am not sure why but for some reason the people who put together this series of readings for the Old Testament thought this text fit the theme for both Sundays. Personally, I think they were just seeing who is brave and who is not. Brave in the sense that you would so close in one year preach on the same text.

Yet, I don’t consider it a big deal. Do you know why? Because the text is being read at two different seasons of the church year. The first time it was used it was the Lent season. Now typically during Lent the emphasis is on the passion of Jesus, what Jesus did for us, namely dying on the cross for our sins. So during Lent, this is a great text because in essence it shows the stubborn nature of man in clinging to sin and rejecting the direction of God. In other words, the text when read for Lent reminds us and shows us why we desperately need a Savior.

And when we read the text for this Sunday it is Pentecost 3. During the Pentecost season the emphasis is on the benefits and life of Jesus. In a great church, that emphasis will always be a clear proclamation of the Gospel and what Jesus has done and accomplished for us. When you understand that, they you can see that again this is a great text because it leads us to contemplate and consider the grace and mercy of God all the more.

Let’s go ahead and jump into our text and discover what we can learn of our God for today. Our theme will be: **HE WILL RESTORE US!**

Now there is something I need to tell you about the Prophet Hosea. This poor guy had to preach to a nation that was in absolute rejection of the True God. It had been rejecting for hundreds of years and God was just about to bring his greatest judgment on these people. Before Hosea dies, God will have the Northern Kingdom of Israel carried off by the Assyrians and they will never be heard of again! Mind you, this is after centuries of God sending prophets and pleading with His people to return, to be a people who put their faith and trust in God for all things. You can pretty well imagine then that Hosea’s life was rather difficult since he was God’s spokesman at a time when no one wanted to hear the truth of God.

Believe it or not, that is not what I wanted to tell you about Hosea’s life. It is important to know but I wanted to tell you of Hosea’s wife. Hosea had been commanded by God, yep, commanded by God to marry an adulterous woman. God did this so the people could see by example what they were doing to Him and how He would react. You see, following after other gods, giving them the glory and honor that is due only to God and listening to the false prophets over and above God is equated in the Old Testament with the idea of “adultery, spiritual adultery.” Adultery! Not being faithful to the one you say you love. Not keeping yourself only for him or her but running after anything but your spouse. That was Hosea’s life. And it seems that Hosea played the role of the Lord our God pretty well. In other words, Hosea was gracious, kind and forgiving toward His wife.

Here is the most interesting part. Hosea had three children and the text indicates that the children were not really Hosea’s! They are called **“children of unfaithfulness.”** It seems that Hosea loved them and took care of them. At one time, his wife had gotten herself into some sort of trouble and ended up a slave. Hosea paid the redemption price to get his wife back. The good news is that it is considered that after that his wife stopped her adultery and remained faithful. (Of course this seems to be after the three kids and years of bad behavior!) I can’t imagine the difficulty of what this man endured and put up with! Not many of us could do that! The important thing to remember is that the Lord endures it all the time. He endures our faithlessness, our spiritual adultery, our giving our souls to another and yet, God is always ready to forgive and restore. That is exactly the emphasis we need for today. Let’s look at this text.

The opening verse is 5:15, the end of chapter 15. It says, **“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.”** These words are spoken by the Lord. The Lord is letting us know that at this point He has drawn a line with these people. I myself, find a great deal of comfort in this boundary line that God displays, because I think God’s “line” shows his grace and love. Here’s how.

God says he is going back to his place. Can you blame Him? For centuries these Israelites have spurned and rejected the Lord God, and this after they had seen and witnessed God’s wonders and marvels among them. They just didn’t want to believe and follow God so God here basically says, “Hey, I am going to grant your wish. I am going to withdraw my presence from you, stop blessing you and stop being your God. I am going to do that until you admit your guilt, that is, until you repent and return to me.”

Do you see the grace of God here? God is letting them have what they want, and it is not Him. So, God is withdrawing, will pull his grace and love from them **“until they admit their guilt.”** In other words, once they repent, God will return, God will relent, God will once again take them as his and bring his blessings and goodness to their lives. God is willing to forgive! God is willing to restore and grant His goodness for the sake of the people! Just contemplate that and realize how gracious and good God really is!

Just as important is the fact that God says he is doing all of this with the desire that they repent. Note that in this verse God tells us that without Him their lives will be misery. That’s the way it is. Without God and his love our lives are just absolute misery. (The sad part is that the world doesn’t see the misery but thinks the misery “good times!” That’s how twisted this world of sin is!) God says that his hope is that this misery is what will lead these people to seek Him out, to earnestly seek him. That earnest part means that their repentance is genuine and heartfelt, not just lip service or not just “sorrow, worldly sorrow” because they got caught. In other words, God is doing His best to bring His people back to Him. Again, notice the grace and mercy of God.

Just a side note here. This passage is not at all saying that every bad thing or every trial and tribulation is brought by God to punish us and make us repent. Think of the Apostles. Most of them died as martyrs because of their faith. God did not do that but rather Satan and the evil world did that. Or think of Paul and his thorn in the flesh which Paul says was so that he didn’t become conceited because of the great revelations he had been given! We do know that God does work this way sometimes but not always. We know these instances because God reveals them to us, God tells us what He is doing. So please do not assume that every trouble or every difficulty is God punishing you. It may be Satan attacking you! What you can know is that God promises He is always with you and that He will always make everything, even the hardships and troubles Satan might bring, serve your eternal life! That we know for sure, anything else is just guessing.

Then come the next verses. There is some dispute as to who speaks these words: is it the people or is it Hosea pleading as God’s prophet? I always go with Hosea, pleading with the people as God’s prophet. And note what the point is as you listen again to what Hosea says, **“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.”**

These words are so awesome. Here is God’s prophet telling us how the Lord operates. “Yes,” he acknowledges “that the Lord has torn us, has injured us. He has allowed these things for our good. He is working to bring us back to him…So let’s do that! You know why we can do that? Because God will heal. God will bind our wounds and revive us. God will once again be as steady and sure as the rains of the land because God is gracious, good and loving!”

Do you know how true these words are? Who here deserves anything from God but judgment and damnation? Who here is perfect and holy, without flaw or blemish? Who here can stand before the Lord God on their own and declare, “God, I have earned my spot in your kingdom because I am not as bad as others!” On our own none of us has a chance. On our own, without God’s grace and love we will only and always be the most miserable people there are.

But when we admit our guilt, when we see our wounds and injuries, the horrors that sin has brought to our lives, when we simply admit that we need and must have the goodness of the Lord, then it is that God grants us his blessings. His blessings are found in the forgiveness of sins. Found in the fact that our spiritual wounds and injuries are always healed and forgiven. His blessing is found in the fact that God grants us the gift of heaven and redemption in Jesus. The promise that this world and its troubles is not the end but rather the time we have been allotted to hear of His marvel, see His love in Jesus and be adopted by grace through faith as the children of God and heirs of eternal life. Hosea knows and understands that God’s desire for us is salvation. God wants our repentance, wants our grasp of His willingness to love us and wants us to see that in Jesus all things are met and realized. Jesus has come to save! Jesus has come to heal and bind up, to revive us with new life and to grant in that new life an eternal life of wonder and marvel with God! That’s the allusion of the phrase **“after two days he will revive us: on the third day he will restore us, that we may live in his presence.”**

The other day on social media a post was made that was supposedly the last thoughts of Steven Jobs, the computer billionaire. If those were his words, in one aspect he was absolutely right. He basically said that money, fame, importance, worldly measures all meant nothing when you realize that death is coming. You can’t pay someone to take your disease or take your place on your death bed. His conclusion was that life was pretty hollow and empty, pretty miserable and forlorn in the face of death. What he said in that regard was right. He had learned that death is the great equalizer in this world. No one can escape it, this bitter and ugly truth of death in life. Where he was wrong is in the fact that he said to make your life worthwhile then love was the thing. To have love and family. Yet that is not right, because in truth, once you are dead, your love is nothing. Your family and good times with them is also gone, a fleeting memory and I will promise that it won’t be long and no one will remember any of that. If those words were from Mr. Jobs he missed the boat. He needed to hear and know about Jesus.

Because the love of Jesus means something. The love of Jesus that gave his life for us. The love of Jesus is eternal and forever. The love of Jesus forgives our sins and restores our souls, that’s what counts. In this life, to know and believe in Jesus is the only thing that really matters. And if you don’t believe me (which the unbeliever won’t), then please call me when you feel you are on your death bed and we will talk about what is important and what isn’t. When you see your life is going to end in this world and you realize how empty it has been, then call me and I will tell you about real life. About God’s love and grace in Jesus, His restoration to us in Jesus is it.

Do you see the hope given in these verses? Not hope in us or the vanities of this world. Not trust in princes or armies or being the best you can be. But to realize that this world created by God is nothing without Him. It is a misery, a hopeless misery. But this same God gives us hope and confidence, gives us the promise of life and salvation. This same God who created is also the God who redeemed and sanctified, who provides all that is necessary for life and eternal life. Turn to the Lord. Trust in Him. He will restore. He will save. Amen.