

group Bible Study – January 23, 2008

Read Hosea Chapter 3

Reflection: Bob Zurinsky, Center for Worship, bob@spu.edu

For our Bible study this week we're reading a very short chapter. There are just five verses in chapter three. A short, difficult, essential chapter.

As we've seen in these first three chapters of Hosea, the LORD spoke to the prophet and told him to marry an unfaithful woman named Gomer. This pair had children: "Not Loved," "Not My People," and "Jezreel" (which basically means "I'm going to massacre my people because of what they've done").

This tortured relationship between Hosea and his wife was given as a symbol of the relationship between God and the whole people. The nation of Israel was a whore. She looked for other lovers. And it was ripping up God's heart. Last week Jeff told us a little bit about his own experience of anguish and jealousy—what it felt like to have his girlfriend making out with another person. Those horrible high school ski trips. This is the book of Hosea. This is what God feels.

But this is what the suffering love of God says in chapter three:

The LORD said to me, "Go, show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another and is an adulteress."

This lover (God) would rather be torn apart than lose his beloved (the people). This is the same kind of self-emptying love that the Apostle Paul describes in Jesus: "He made himself nothing (*ekenosen*), taking the very nature of a servant" (Philippians 2). In this Greek word *kenosis*, or "self-emptying," or "making oneself nothing," we learn something important about our God. And it's the same lesson we find in Hosea.

God chooses to be wounded, if that is what it takes to love.

And we're the ones who are wounding.

And we're the ones that God wants.

And we're the ones that God will one day have as his own.

"They will come trembling to the LORD and to his blessings in the last days" (Hosea 3:5).

I wonder how our lives might look if we knew these things deep down.

Discussion Questions (for individuals or small groups):

- In Hosea 3:1 we read that the LORD loves the people "though they love the sacred raisin cakes." OK. These raisin cakes were special treats that were offered as sacrifices to Baal or Ishtar—the other gods that the people were worshiping in the land. These raisin cakes are a symbol of unfaithfulness, prostitution. This week, talk about your own raisin cakes—what are the "gods of this land" that we make sacrifices to, and what does that look like practically in our lives? What are the idols that we prostitute ourselves to? Is it "success"? Is it the unhealthy way we crave affirmation from others? Is it a need to be cool or popular or superior or perfect? This is a very big question. This is exactly the question that God intends to ask us in Hosea.