

The Fourth Sunday After Pentecost (June 28, 2020)	1858
O. T. Lesson: Exodus 19:2-8a	Morning Praise: p. 45
Epistle: Romans 5:6-11	221
Gospel: Matthew 9:35—10:8	Psalm 100
Text: Hosea 6:6	379
Theme: <u>God Desires Mercy, Not Sacrifice.</u>	303
I. God has shown mercy to us.	498
II. God desires that we show mercy to others.	

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all!

Hosea 6:6 Where the Lord says:

"For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings."

Heavenly Father, sanctify us by your truth; your word is truth!

Dear friends to whom God has shown mercy,

The evangelist Spurgeon told of an old man, a coachman, who once carried him in his cab. As the famous preacher entered the vehicle, he dropped a remark concerning the coachman's age, and then added, "Well, I hope that you have seen to it that yours will be a pleasant lot, when this life comes to an end."

"Yes sir," answered the old man, "I think I have; for as far as I know, I have never been drunk in my life, I have never used a profane word, and, then I also go to church now and then."

The coachman seemed to be quite satisfied with himself and was greatly surprised when Spurgeon expressed his grave doubts as to his going to heaven, if he should die in such a self-righteous state of mind.

Unfortunately, this self-righteousness is very common among people who call themselves Christians. Even though they may not always express it in the words of the old cab driver, it is always the same idea: that they will get to heaven because of the good they have done, or the evil they have left undone; that they will get to heaven because of the sacrifices they have made for God. We need always to be on our guard against this soul-destroying lie that we are in good standing with God because of things we have done; because we go to church, because we give toward missions, because we are good toward others, because we have given up this or that in our lives, because we have made all these sacrifices to God. God's word in the Book of Hosea comes thundering down upon us: "I desire mercy, not sacrifice."

Who was this Hosea, through whom God spoke those important words? Hosea was a prophet of the Lord in the Northern Kingdom of Israel about 750 years before Jesus' birth. Hosea is one of those "minor" prophets about whom we don't usually hear that much, and that is unfortunate. He's really quite easy to remember. Hosea is the prophet who married a prostitute. You heard me right. God called Hosea to be his prophet, and one of the first things God told him to do was, "Go and marry a prostitute, an obvious prostitute, one with illegitimate children." So Hosea married this prostitute named Gomer.

Why in the world did the Lord tell his prophet to do such a thing? Because Hosea's marriage was to be a picture of the Lord's relationship to Israel. This was a particularly wicked time in Israel's history. By rejecting the Lord and worshiping Canaanite idols like Baal and

Asherah, the people had committed spiritual adultery against the Lord. The Lord had been a faithful husband to them, but instead of responding to him with equal faithfulness, they were prostituting themselves to other gods. Still the Lord had a message of mercy, a message of faithful love for his unfaithful people, a message that he called upon Hosea to proclaim, not only with his mouth, but with his own body, life and actions. As Hosea lovingly received the Harlot Gomer as his wife and forgave her, so the Lord would mercifully receive unfaithful Israel as his own and forgive them. What a vivid picture of God's undeserved love, love for the unlovable, forgiveness for the unforgivable.

In Ephesians 5 we hear about Christ's love for his church, which he cleansed from her adultery: "Christ loved the church (his bride) and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word."

God has shown that same mercy, that same faithful love to us. If we have looked beneath the surface of our own lives, we realize that we also have been unfaithful to our God. We have no more claim on his love than the harlot Gomer had on the love of her husband Hosea. Yet despite our unfaithfulness, still the Lord loves us. "God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." [Rom. 5:8] God desires mercy, not sacrifice. He has shown mercy to us. He desires that we repent of our unfaithfulness and receive his forgiveness and love.

God says: "For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings." But hadn't God commanded his Old Testament people to offer sacrifices and burnt offerings? God is not speaking against sacrifices; but rather, against improper sacrifices, loveless sacrifices, sacrifices that flow from a heart that does not truly love and trust in him. The people of Hosea's day were sacrificing only because their unfaithfulness to the Lord had gotten them into all kinds of trouble. The Assyrian armies were soon going to defeat and destroy their nation. So they said, "Let's sacrifice to the Lord. Then he'll be happy with us and save us."--mere outward actions--turning to the Lord in their hour of need, but the next hour they would turn away from the Lord once again. What was lacking in them? They failed to repent, failed to say, "I have sinned. I have been unfaithful to you. Lord, forgive me." They failed to receive God's mercy, his love and forgiveness.

This was not the only time the Lord denounced sacrifices that were not pleasing to him. In Isaiah, chapter one, the Lord told the people that their meaningless sacrifices were detestable to him: "The multitude of your sacrifices--what are they to me?" says the LORD. "I have more than enough of burnt offerings, of rams and the fat of fattened animals; I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats. When you come to meet with me, who has asked this of you, this trampling of my courts? Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to me. New moons, Sabbaths and convocations--I cannot bear your evil assemblies. Your New Moon festivals and your appointed feasts my soul hates. They have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them. When you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide my eyes from you; even if you offer many prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are full of blood; wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight! Stop doing wrong, learn to do right!"

You may recall the time the Lord told King Saul to attack the wicked Amalekites and totally destroy everything that belonged to them. Saul attacked and defeated them, but contrary to the Lord's command, he kept the best of the sheep and cattle and all that was good. When the prophet Samuel questioned Saul, Saul made the excuse that he kept the best in order to sacrifice them to the Lord. Then Samuel told him: "Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the LORD? To obey is better than sacrifice. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, he has rejected you as king." [I Sam. 15:22-23]

What then does the Lord want? "I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings." The Lord has shown his faithful love to us, winning our salvation in Christ. He seeks faithful love from us in return. Our worship, our prayers, our deeds, our offerings, all our sacrifices mean nothing if they are not brought out of faithful love and trust in the Lord who is our only Savior. God wants his people to acknowledge him; that is, to trust in him alone as our Savior and Lord. Then he is also pleased with our sacrifices, as we express our love to him in our worship, prayers and offerings.

How grateful we should be that God doesn't demand that we satisfy him with our sacrifices, because we never could. All our sacrifices cannot make up for even a single one of our sins. God has provided our sacrifice on Calvary's cross. He has shown mercy to us, and wants us to receive that mercy by repenting of our sins and turning to his faithful love and forgiveness. Psalm 51 tells us: "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise....Then there will be righteous sacrifices."

When we repent of our unfaithfulness and receive God's faithful love, then we begin to understand God's words: "I desire mercy, not sacrifice." Those words mean that just as God has shown mercy to us, he desires that we show mercy to others. We show our faithful love to God by worshiping him not only in church, but every day in our lives, by looking out for the physical and spiritual needs of others, by defending the powerless, clothing the naked, feeding the hungry, showing mercy to others as God has shown mercy to us.

Twice in the New Testament, Jesus quotes our verse from Hosea. In Matthew, chapter nine, we hear how Jesus called Matthew to be one of his disciples. Matthew had been a tax collector, a position that most Jews looked down upon, because the tax collectors worked for the enemy Roman government, and often cheated people. Matthew had a big dinner at his house in honor of Jesus, and we are told that many tax collectors and "sinners" came and ate with Jesus and his disciples. The Pharisees had a problem with that. They didn't think that Jesus should have anything to do with such tax collectors and sinners. When Jesus heard them grumbling, he told them, "Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.'"

Those Pharisees thought they knew practically all there was to know about religion. But Jesus here informed them that in reality they knew very little, that they were ignorant of the very basics of salvation. The Pharisees thought that they could cover their sins by simply going through the motions of religion, by simply sacrificing, and they despised others who didn't go through the motions as well as they. But a mere going through the motions is detestable to God. True religion must be of the heart, sincere repentance over sin, and faith in Christ as the only Savior, faith that is followed by mercy toward others, whoever they may be, even tax collectors and sinners. And the greatest mercy one can show another is to proclaim God's word to him and call him to repentance. This Jesus was doing for those tax collectors and sinners. What a noble work compared to the dead formalism of the Pharisees, who cared nothing about the spiritual welfare of others. The very fact that they didn't show mercy to others shows that they had rejected God's mercy for themselves. Those Pharisees were in just as much need of forgiveness as the tax collectors and sinners.

On another occasion Jesus and his disciples were walking through the grain fields on the Sabbath Day. The disciples were hungry and began to pick the grain and eat it. When the Pharisees saw this they were quick to condemn them for working on the Sabbath Day. See, the disciples weren't going through the motions like the Pharisees thought they should. Jesus again told the Pharisees, "If you had known what these words mean, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the innocent." The Pharisees were so taken up with their legalism and going through the motions that they were unable to have mercy on others who were in distress.

We too can probably think of others who don't quite measure up to our standards, people who perhaps have committed terrible sins, people whom we might be tempted to look down upon. But God desires mercy. He desires that we show mercy to them, that we help them in whatever way we can, and above all, that we proclaim God's mercy, God's faithful love, God's free forgiveness to them, realizing that we ourselves are God's children only through that same mercy. We might be tempted to demand others to make up for their wrongs. But that's not mercy, that's not forgiveness. Where would you or I be if God demanded us to make up for our wrongs? In all our relationships, with every person we meet, in everything we do, let us remember: God desires mercy, not sacrifice. God has shown mercy to us. He desires that, as we live in his mercy, we show that same mercy to others.

Amen.

May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word! Amen.