

Sermon
27 September 2015
Polbeth Harwood & West Kirk of Calder

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Text: Hosea 2:14-20

Just to put you in the picture:

Once upon a time, there was a prophet who lived in a far away land... One day, God told him to marry an adulterous woman, so he did. They had 3 children together, and they were happy for a wee while, but the woman got bored with this very predicatble lifestyle and ventured off to greener pastures.

But by this time, the prophet was so much in love with his wife, he forgave her and did everything in his power to win her back. And it worked for a little bit. But then she got bored and hit the road again. And again.

In real life this prophet would have probably told her to never come back if she can't stay faithful to him, but because fairytales have happy endings, that's *not* what happened... He travelled all over the world to find her, and when he did, he paid all the money he had to get her back.

Because his love for her was bigger than her unfaithfulness to him. And they all lived happily ever after. The end.

Fairy tale? Definitely sounds like one. But no. History. The prophet's name was Hosea, and he acted as prophet of God in Israel from roughly 755-722BC. The woman's name was Gomer.

As it was a prophet's job to be the mouthpiece between God and his people, God told Hosea to marry Gomer, as a metaphor of his own relationship with Israel. God loved Israel with all his heart, but they were like an unfaithful partner. No matter how much God loved them, they kept looking for greener pastures. But God never gave up on them. Eventually he even had to *pay* to get them back, but he did that, because his love was bigger than their unfaithfulness.

What a story! If there is one thing nobody can ever say, it's that the Bible is a boring book!!

Let's now read a few verses from the book of Hosea...

Sermon:

The verses I want to focus on in today's sermon are verses 14 & 15: *"...I will lead her into the desert and speak tenderly to her. There I will give her back vineyards, and make the Valley of Achor a door of hope."*

The word "Achor" means "trouble". So: Hosea will lead his wife/God will lead his people - into the desert and speak tenderly to them. And there, in the dry desert, he will do something that would seem impossible – he will give them back their fruitful vineyards.

In other words: God will turn their valley of trouble into a door of hope.

To me this is one of the most amazing expressions in the Bible. *God will turn our valley of trouble into a door of hope.*

I think that, in great shame, we will have to admit that very often we are not much better than Israel was all those many years ago. We know that God loves us. We know that He expects us to live in a certain way, that He wants us to be true to him alone, and not serve him *and* the world at the same time.

But every so often we fall, we choose the world with its pleasures and greener pastures, the easy way out, the things everybody else does and get away with: Little white lies, egocentrism, hopelessness, gossiping, laziness, anger, materialism – adultery to God.

But that's just not right. God promised to stay faithful to us. In Jesus he paid a price for us that's beyond human understanding, and he keeps loving us, no matter what we do. But if we are not faithful and true to him – where does that leave *him*? Feeling like a loving, caring husband with an unfaithful wife?

This is a strong metaphor, but it's like that for a reason, because it has to get us thinking about our behaviour. God will *never* be untrue to us, so we shouldn't ever be untrue to him either. We are so easily distracted, but we should never allow anything or anybody to come between us and God.

The problem is just, when we face difficulties, we sometimes feel so very alone, that we forget that God is still there, that he will never leave us alone.

We very often feel negative about being in a proverbial emotional or spiritual “desert” – alone, in the scorching sun, with miles and miles of *nothing* all around us. As if nobody loves us and the whole world has forgotten about us. Including God.

I’m talking about that feeling you have when you sit at the funeral of someone you loved very much – like so many of us did this past week; that feeling you have when your partner or best friend was unfaithful to you; that feeling you have when you get bad news – about your job, your children, your health; that feeling you get when nothing works out the way you planned.

We feel negative about being in the desert.

But in this passage God gives the desert a positive connotation. Because in the desert, there are no distractions. The desert is a quiet place where we can be alone with our thoughts and with God. Where we can forget about everything else and just start working on our relationship with him again.

It’s not possible to make a new start amidst the hustle and bustle of everyday life. But alone, in the desert, a new start can become a reality.

Stripped completely from all our pride and pretence, we can take a look at who we are and decide who we want to be. But this is only possible if we are not busy with a million other things at the same time too.

That’s why we sometimes *need* the desert, even though it’s hard.

But today God is telling us that it doesn't only have to be hard, because he can make our *valley of trouble* a *door of hope*.

A *valley*, a place where you can get stuck, a place where you can get lost; can through the grace of God become a *door* – an entrance... An entrance back to normality, or an entrance to something completely new.

On my way here in the car this morning I noticed the leaves turning red and yellow. We need the autumn and the winter too; otherwise we wouldn't have any flowers, plants and crops growing in the spring and summer. And if it was summer all year long, we definitely wouldn't have appreciated the good weather at all.

Just like that we sometimes need a desert in our lives. Even though we dread it, fear it, dislike it. Because in this desert, God can give you a vineyard. God can make your relationship with him become fruitful. The desert teaches us to fully rely on God, because there is nothing and no-one else to rely on there, so in the desert we learn to put all our trust in God.

In your valley of trouble, God can give you a door of hope.

So do not despise the dry seasons you sometimes find yourself in, but instead recognise that they are the optimum conditions for you to strengthen yourself in the Lord. Do not despise the difficult times and look elsewhere for hope, but run to, and find God, and He will encounter you in ways you have yet to experience.

Even though you feel alone, remember – you are not. God is always there. He is the loving husband who never gives up on his wife, no matter what she does, because he *chose* her despite her shortcomings, and he *loves* her with all his heart.

So allow God to carry you over the threshold of the door to your future,
Because then you will be able to live *happily ever after*.

Amen