

“A Mismatch Made in Heaven”

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A Reflection for the First Sunday of Advent

Hosea 1; Matthew 1:18-25

December 2, 2018

Read the Scriptures by clicking [here](#) and [here](#).

“You’ve made your bed. Now lie in it.”

That means I live with the consequences of things I’ve done. But that’s a hard truth.

Gomer had been in many beds.

I wasn’t sure what word fits best what Gomer was known for. The Hebrew word (*zenunim*) covers a whole bunch of things. Maybe she had repeatedly cheated on her husband, now her ex. Maybe she had sold herself for sex. I decided “sleeping around” covered everything.¹

What led her to this? Had she chosen this life? Probably not. It’s not the sort of thing you want to be when you grow up. No, I suspect it was one decision at a time, one fling and then the next. Maybe she’d wanted to feel wanted. Needed. Desired. Loved. Maybe she’d needed the money. Maybe she’d liked it.

It fell together into a lifestyle. What was she looking for? I mean, really looking for. Was she finding it? I doubt that. But she could find no other way.

What was she left feeling when each time was finished? Hopeful? Fearful? Guilty? Excited? Horrified? Satisfied? Numb? Ashamed? Had her feelings changed over time?

You can guess how everyone felt about her. *“Gomer, she’s a . . .”* (You can fill in the rest.)

So when her father said that he had matched her with another husband, no way did she believe it. She tried to search his eyes but, as always, he was looking away from her.

“It’s Hosea,” he said. *“Hosea the prophet.”*

Gomer laughed. Then, a tear.

¹ J. Glen Taylor, “Hosea” in John H. Walton (ed), Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary Volume 2 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 7.

II

Hosea shed tears too, before and many times after their wedding day.

He was a prophet! A messenger for the Lord! Those messages from prophets, they are usually hard and pointed, rarely welcomed, and sometimes dangerous. “Prophet” and “popularity” rarely go together.

Still, within the community of God’s People, the vocation of “prophet” had gained well-deserved respect. If God’s Spirit speaks through you, you must be close to God. Let’s say “righteous”: faithful to God’s covenant, diligent in God’s commandments, painfully good.

So God’s marriage-match for righteous Hosea . . . let’s say it was extremely unexpected and unwelcome. *“Go to Gomer. Yes, that Gomer. You’ll find her on the street corner. Marry her.”*

His father’s face when Hosea asked him to arrange this said it. *“Is this a joke? Hosea, are you mad?”*

Hosea wondered.

Eventually their children came along. At least, hers. He could never be sure. Any resemblance they shared with him could have been coincidence. Still, obedient to the hard command of God, Hosea accepted them. He named them:

The oldest . . . Jezreel: “God scatters.”²

The daughter . . . Lo-Ruhamah: “No Compassion.”

The little one . . . Lo-Ammi: “Not Mine.”

I hope they got other names too, ones they could actually use.³ Still, you know they’re going to have issues.

Hosea had an issue, with God. Those baby names were God’s idea

² “Jezreel” can also have a positive sense, “God sows” (as in sowing seed). It was a valley in the northern kingdom, site of a royal residence. The valley was fertile and beautiful, and an important transit way between the Mediterranean coastal region and the Jordan valley inland. Ominously, it was the site of a coup and assassinations against Israel’s monarch (2 Kings 9-10). See Taylor, 13f.

³ John Goldingay cautions us: “. . . we shouldn’t misunderstand the way names in the Bible work. Many people were given odd names that don’t look like the names people would use every day and would thus make the children the object of laughter at school. Maybe they were just used in some way at the child’s naming ceremony.” I hope Goldingay is right. Daniel & The Twelve Prophets for Everyone (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2016), 65f.

III

A prophet speaks God's words to us. A prophet tells us what is really going on, through God's eyes. Hosea's call was not only to tell, but:

to show us God's pain and grief;
to show us by experiencing it in his own life;
to show us, so we can see what is going on with us and God.

Go, marry a woman who sleeps around . . .

Will marriage change Gomer's ways? It hadn't before.

God's call: *"Go, Hosea, and endure again and again betrayal, rejection and anger."*

What do you suppose happens to Hosea's reputation when he becomes the guy who married Gomer?

God's call: *"Go, righteous Hosea — good, holy and upright — and become known and judged by the company you keep, the match you've made."*

"Mismatch" is more like it.

Hosea and Gomer are a living parable of God and God's People.

*Go, marry a woman who sleeps around . . .
For my people are sleeping around
by being unfaithful to me, the Lord.*

God's People. They knew about the Lord, the God of Abraham, Moses and David. They loved the Lord's festivals, kept the Lord's Sabbath day (when they had time), kept the Lord's Commandments (when it worked for them). When you need rain for your crops, though, an offering to the neighbourhood weather god couldn't hurt. (The Lord won't mind.) Having trouble conceiving? Worshipping the local fertility god might help. (Everyone loves babies.)

This is spiritual sleeping-around. It is entrusting ourselves to anything instead of God, or even alongside God. It is ancient, and it's new every morning. We can't seem to believe, to really believe, that God has us and we belong to God. Trusting God alone seems a gamble. Worried about your future? Pray to the Lord, but try to win the lottery too. We hedge our bets. But casino chips are just plastic. The ancient gods were just wood and stone. Nothing else comes close to matching God.

Advent is here, so Christmas is coming. It's wonderful. It's spiritually dangerous. We are celebrating our Beloved Jesus, God-in-Person who has come to us. We're getting ready. We're preparing our hearts. We're anticipating. We're waiting. Then this "hot number"

walks by, one of those “I want that!” moments. Yes, I’ll celebrate Jesus . . . and here’s my wish list. And I have to get “so and so” the right gift. And my home done up right. And dinner prepared deliciously (with good presentation). And the family all together. These are good . . . they’re dangerous too. We turn to them for our sense of success, of what makes a “good Christmas.”

Friends, it is already perfect. Jesus is born! Why do we look elsewhere?

IV

In their mismatched marriage parable, Hosea represents God. Gomer, us. God keeps coming to us.

Our spiritual track record is a lot of sleeping around. God waits for us to come home. We break God’s heart. God takes us back.

Working on this story, I noticed something obvious, except I hadn’t seen it before. God told righteous Joseph to wed already-pregnant-and-it-wasn’t-his Mary. Those of us “in the know” know what was going on. No one else did. Around town, she’d become . . . Gomer. Joseph married her, both their reputations be damned. He chose her, stuck with her, loved her. Another parable of God.

That Child whom she had and they raised, Jesus . . . he is God choosing us.

How he chose us!

Much later, one of Jesus’ followers would write this:

God proves his love for us, in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us. . . . If we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son while we were still enemies, now that we have been reconciled, how much more certain is it that we will be saved by his life? . . . our Lord Jesus Christ, the one through whom we now have a restored relationship with God.⁴

Jezreel — “God scatters” — God gathers you within God’s embrace.

Lo-Ruhamah — “No Compassion” — God covers you with God’s mercy.⁵

Lo-Ammi — “Not Mine” — you are the child of the living God.⁶

God still chooses you. Again and again, God chooses to join Godself with you, through Jesus.

It’s a mismatch . . . made in Heaven.

⁴ From Romans 5:6-11.

⁵ The Hebrew word can be translated as “compassion” or “mercy.”

⁶ See Hosea 1:10.