

The LORD's Kindness Calls

☆ to rebellious children (vv.1-2)

☆ to care for His own (vv.3-4)

In the name of Jesus our newborn Savior, dear rejoicing Christians, family members of our faithful God:

This is a strange sermon text from a very strange book of the Bible. In today's Gospel Lesson we heard Matthew quote from Hosea with God saying, "*Out of Egypt have I called my Son.*" (Matthew 2:15) But in Hosea, the LORD is talking about the nation of Israel as His rebellious "son." God the Holy Spirit inspired both writers to put it this way. And God the Holy Spirit inspired this prophecy of Hosea who was commanded by God to marry a prostitute named Gomer, have children, and keep calling her back from her wicked lifestyle. I'm convinced God gave a Children's Lesson about His faithful love.

Do we need this? Take Christmas examples. If we did not recognize Jesus and His parents, would we have made room for them in our house? Do we practice hospitality? Would we have gone with the Wise Men to visit Baby Jesus? Or do we stand silently by while modern "Herods" kill the innocent unborn? We need the Christ of Christmas all year. Today again **The LORD's Kindness Calls...**

☆ to rebellious children (vv.1-2)

Can you hear the heavenly Father's aching heart? His dear Holy Spirit inspired Hosea to write: "*When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. But the more I called Israel, the further they went from me. They sacrificed to the Baals and they burned incense to images.*"

Baal was an ancient fertility god, worshiped in gross orgies. Pornography was everywhere. They had open air theater; we have technology. The human heart is still evil despite God's judgment on sex outside of marriage. The LORD who called His chosen nation of Israel out of slavery in Egypt was warning them about new captivity. But they yawned like Hosea's adulterous wife and sinned more.

The way the Lord keeps calling, we ought to tire ourselves out in worship and prayer, *calling on* and *calling out* His holy Name more energetically than we watch movies, play sports, hunt or fish. **The LORD's Kindness** deserves more. Instead, we slip into mindless prayers and liturgies, rich in meaning if we think about what we're saying. Some try to solve the problem with modern music, but there too you can trade empty formalism for mere entertainment in the name of worship. Instead of giving God our best, we give the easiest, most comfortable and mundane.

Years ago a missionary Pastor John Hering described a brand new 60' Buddha built in Japan. Worshipers would lay offerings and prayers at its feet, then ride the elevator up into Buddha's head. Pastor Hering and his family were surprised to find a toilet up there. The same worshipers who laid offerings at idol feet and prayed for help, saw no problem going to the bathroom in Buddha's head.

One sad irony of idol-worship is that the poor give what little they have to objects that cannot help or rescue anyone. Have you noticed how lotteries hurt poor people? The wealthy see the impossible odds and keep their money. But the poor with barely enough to eat put their hope in chance. What should be spent for food and clothing buys worthless tickets. In a study group one pastor noted how we Americans resemble other cultures in their idolatry. He asked, "Do you know the most expensive maintenance item for casino slot machines? Answer: The carpet where players stand. They're so busy pulling the lever, they can't leave for the bathroom." And the worldly rich are spiritually poor. They spend their wealth on psychics and psychiatrists who cannot save themselves, much less the souls of others.

How desperately we all need the LORD! We attach our affections to people, places and things, worshiping creation instead of our Creator. As faithful preachers keep on warning us, “Whatever holds your affections, that is your idol.” With Paul we ask, “*Who will rescue me from this body of death?*” With Paul we pray, “*Thanks be to God – through Jesus Christ our Lord!*” (Romans 7:24f) Meanwhile through Word and sacraments **The LORD’s Kindness Calls:**

☆ **to care for His own (vv.3-4)**

Can any parents relate to the LORD’s heart here? “*It was I who taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by the arms; but they did not realize it was I who healed them. I led them with cords of human kindness, with ties of love; I lifted the yoke from their neck and bent down to feed them.*”

At a pastors’ conference someone asked, “What about children who grow up in a Christian family, but then turn away from the Lord in their adult life? Doesn’t the Lord promise, ‘*Bring up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it?*’” Watch the LORD, the perfect parent and perfect husband. Can’t you hear Him asking His unfaithful wife or rebellious son – both used as pictures for Israel: “*What more could I have done for you?*” (Isaiah 5:4) When my children were little, I was on my knees asking the Lord to bring them up in His training and admonition. I needed wisdom; they needed faith. When children grow up and honor God, praise the Lord! If they are rebellious, remember the Lord’s struggles with His own “wife and children” of Israel.

And yet, here is the wonder of God’s grace. In such a failed marriage like God with Israel or Hosea with his whoring wife Gomer, divorce would be expected. But the LORD God did the unexpected. He made a New Covenant of pure grace, a remarriage born in heaven: “*The time is coming,*” declares the LORD, “*when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them,*” declares the LORD. “*This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time,*” declares the LORD. “*I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,*” declares the LORD. “*For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.*” (Jeremiah 31:31–34 NIV84) Who but our gracious God could think of such a solution? Who but our almighty Creator and all-loving Savior could carry it out?

“*Therefore I am now going to allure her; I will lead her into the desert and speak tenderly to her.*” (Hosea 2:14 NIV84) As a loving husband anticipates his first date with his wife after a time of turmoil, so the LORD is looking forward to having Israel close to His heart again. She would forget her former stubbornness in the warmth of His embrace. And He who took away her sin, would never call it to mind again. God’s Word and sacrament work like that. The Holy Spirit softens our hearts with the water of Baptism and opens us up to His grace and mercy by His body and blood. “*Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.*” (Romans 5:20 KJV) Love restored is sweet indeed!

“Often we repeat the national history of Israel in our personal lives. The Lord made many of us his own sons and daughters through Baptism so early in our lives that we have no memory of the event. Yet even then he loved us and freed us from the yoke of slavery to sin and Satan. His care and protection have gone with us from our youngest years, through the love of our Christian parents and teachers. Yet many days of our lives, we totally forget that it is the Lord who fed, protected, trained, and healed us. How can we forget to thank him for all the goodness and mercy we have experienced from little on?”¹

The Lord’s Kindness Calls. Can you hear Him calling you? Let Him have His way with you **to care for His own.** Amen.

¹ Eickmann, P. E. (1989). *Hosea, Joel, Amos* (2nd ed., p. 97). Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Pub. House.