

7 March 2018
Lent 3 Midweek

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church

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“Return to the Lord . . . Who Will Raise You Up”

Text: Hosea 6:1-6; Matthew 15:21-28

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

The past two Wednesdays we have heard the call to “return to the Lord.” And so far it’s been a no-brainer. We return to the Lord because He is the one who has redeemed us, and has promised to restore us. But tonight we heard something a bit different; something that might make it a bit harder to return to the Lord - that the Lord is the one who *has brought discipline upon you*. He is the one, Hosea says, who *has torn us* and *has struck us down*. Even though His intentions are good . . . Hosea says that He has done these things *that he may heal us* and that *he will bind us up* . . . but still. Discipline is hard. Discipline isn’t pleasant. It is hard to return to the Lord who tears you and strikes you down. How do you do that?

Well, Hosea says, because you *know the Lord*. And that little word “know” there doesn’t just mean mental knowledge - it is a relationship word. To know the Lord is to know Him as a husband and wife know one another. It is a physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual union that joins us together, that forms a bond between the two, making them one. To know the Lord isn’t to know Him as a God far away and distant, but to know Him as your Father, and you as His dear child. A God who has united Himself to you and you to Him.

So what do we *know* about this Lord? Well, Hosea says two things: first, that *his going out is as sure as the dawn*; and second, that *he will come to us as the showers, as the spring rains that water the earth*.

Or in other words, first, that he is reliable. He is as reliable as the dawn; as the sun coming up in the morning. I don’t think many of us go to bed at night wondering if the sun will come up in the morning - we know that it will! It has every morning of your life so far, and it will tomorrow, too. And God, your Father, will come to you too. You don’t have to wonder whether He will or not. He is faithful, steadfast, and reliable. There may be a lot of things you cannot count on in this world and life, but He is not one of them. Even if He disciplines you, He will come and help you.

And then Hosea gives us that second example as well: that your Father is as reliable as the spring rains. Soon we will say: *April showers bring May flowers*, for we know they will. The spring rains come and produce growth . . . and so does your Father come and

produce growth in you.

So if we know that about God our Father, why does His discipline make it hard or challenging to return? Well, Hosea goes on to say that as well - it's not because of Him; it's because of us. For our love, Hosea says, isn't steadfast and reliable like the Lord's. Our love, he says, *is like a morning cloud*, like *the dew that goes early away*. Like a morning cloud that quickly vanishes. Like the dew that quickly evaporates. That's our love. Sometimes great, sometimes small. At times steadfast, at times weak. At first longsuffering, but after a while, grows tired and impatient.

Love is hard to sustain - toward our neighbor *and also toward God*. Our prayers, our devotions, our obedience, our confidence, comes and goes, right? Good one day and then weak the next. Like a morning cloud or dew that goes early away. And so maybe since that's how our love is, we think that how God's love is, too. And so we make it hard to return. We make it hard to return when we forget and do not know; when we forget who God really is.

And so He disciplines us. Not only to show us ourselves and our little faith, but also to love us and show us His love. ***He has torn us, that he may heal us! He has struck us down, and he will bind us up.*** It's as if He wants to prove Himself again and again. Until, like the sun, we stop doubting whether He will arise and shine upon us - we know that He will. For we know Him.

And where we know Him best is when our Lord was hanging on the cross for us. For you and me. For your unreliability and mine. For your failures and mine. For your unbelief and mine. But as Hosea says: ***after two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him.***

The Lord has a way with the third day. And just as He raised Jesus on the third day, so too will He raise us. He actually already has. For in Holy Baptism we've been crucified and raised with Christ. In Baptism we've been joined to Christ and have already passed through death to life with Him, and so have already begun to live in that day and life that cannot be ended. Your sins have been atoned for and forgiven, and so for you there is life. Discipline now, maybe. But discipline that serves life.

We heard of that a bit in the reading from Matthew tonight as well. Talk about a time when it would have been hard to return to the Lord! That poor Canaanite woman comes to Jesus and wants only His mercy on her daughter, and yet it seems as if Jesus doesn't want to help at all. But somehow, she knows Jesus. She knows He is the Lord. She knows He is the Son of David. She knows He will have mercy. The Word of God has worked such faith in her heart, and so she returns to the Lord again and again and again. She will not leave. She knows He will rise like the sun and come like the spring rains. She knows Him.

It was the disciples who weren't so sure. The disciples who had been with Jesus for some time and really ought to have known better! But it is they who don't know Him. They ask Jesus to *send her away* . . . really? Haven't they been paying attention?

What about you? Are you more like the disciples, not so sure of your Lord's love, especially in those times of discipline, when it seems that He doesn't want to help and won't help? Or are you more like the Canaanite woman, who won't let Him go? Maybe both.

So come, *let us return to the Lord*. To the Lord who is as reliable as the sun and the spring rains. To the Lord who disciplines in order to raise us up. To the Lord who helped Israel, who helped a Canaanite woman and her daughter, and who will help you. And even more, saves you. For Christ's third day is your day as well. That's your Lord. **He will do it.**

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.