



*United Presbyterian Church
Harrodsburg, Kentucky
Hosea 11:1-9; Luke 12:13-21*

*Sunday August 30, 2020
Rev. Bert Eyster*

SERMON: Compulsive Behavior

How many people with obsessive-compulsive behavior have you met? Go see the movie “As Good As It Gets”. Meet Jack Nicholson who exhibits obsessive-compulsive behavior. When you first meet this man who must switch the light 5 times, lock the door 5 times and wash his hands with 5 bars of soap you know that you are in for a taste of reality. No wonder he won an Oscar. You and I could identify with his actions.

What could cause us to “get into” such a movie? Could it be that we get a glimpse of what God is like? Hosea was a prophet who lived about 700 years before Jesus was born. Biblical prophets aren’t seers or fortune-tellers, writing in riddles so you and I can figure out tomorrow. They don’t “tell it like it will be,” so much as they “tell it like it is.” Hosea, and others like him, confronted the people of God with where God was with them. Speaking for God, Hosea says, *“The more I called them (to go the right way, says God) the more they went from me. My people are bent on turning away from me (going their own way).”* (Hosea 11:2, 7)

1. God’s behavior toward his people is compulsive.

In today's Old Testament text, the prophet Hosea reveals just how “unbalanced” God is. Since God took the great divine risk in forming creation and imaging humanity with his own breath of life, God has compulsively stuck with us. Despite the fact that human beings almost immediately disobeyed the divine directives and dismissed the divine presence, God has steadfastly refused to write us off. God, it seems, is obsessed with reaching the hearts and souls of men and women. God is obsessed with finding a way to restore a right relationship between Creator and creature. God is obsessed with a ridiculous love for men and women despite our endless troublemaking, disobedient attitudes and disappointing behavior.

Hosea's text equates God's obsessive love for our fractured humanity with that of a parent for a child. Hosea describes the way to live, by describing the way God loves. It’s “in-spite-of” love. Love that goes on loving even the most unlovable. Love that loves you no matter where you

are. Hosea says that this is the nature of God: that the heat of God's anger becomes the warmth of God's love.

The good news of the gospel is not that you get what you've got coming, but that God is coming to get you and hold you in his arms. In spite of all the wrong that God's people had done, says Hosea, God still said: *"How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, O Israel? How can I make you like Admah? How can I treat you like Zeboiim? My heart recoils within me; my compassion grows warm and tender. I will not execute my fierce anger; I will not again destroy Ephraim; for I am God and no mortal, the Holy One in your midst, and I will not come in wrath".* (Hosea 11:8, 9)

2. Is our behavior compulsive?

Actually, Madison Avenue has become quite adept at turning this entire country into a nation of obsessive-compulsives. Through skillful advertising we have been trained to compulsively:

Shop for more clothes, when our closets are already bursting.

Desire more gadgets, when we haven't yet figured out how to use the ones we've got.

Upgrade our "old" TVs, VCRs, computer systems and stereos,
even beyond our capacity to enjoy them.

Get rid of the car that is paid for and that we really love,
before it loses any more of its trade-in value.

Buy anything that promises to make us look younger, richer, thinner or more exciting.

Our culture makes it easy and acceptable to be obsessive about money, to be compulsive about material goods. That same kind of obsessive-compulsive power, however, is judged "suspect," "unhealthy" and even "unbalanced" when we direct it toward a search for the holy in our lives.

Peter Wehner, director of policy at the conservative think tank Empower America, writes in The Washington Post: "Assume that you had never read the New Testament and were given a quiz with this question: 'During his ministry, Christ spoke out most often about (a) the evils of homosexuality, (b) the merits of democracy, (3) family-friendly tax cuts or (d) the danger of riches.'" (Peter Wehner, "In Pursuit of Wealth, Christians Have Forgotten Biblical Teaching,"

Prism, July/August 1997, page 7). I hope you know that Christ said nothing about the first three, (homosexuality, democracy, or tax cuts). Jesus talked a lot about the danger of riches. “You would never know it based on the rhetoric of many modern-day Christians—particularly politically active ones. What obsesses us, church? What obsessed Jesus?” (Ibid.)

3. The good news, according to Hosea, would have us consider what success is.

If “*success* (in life) isn’t how far you got, but the distance you traveled from where you started,” *failure* in life isn’t how far you got either, but whether you went the right way. Whether, where you are, is closer to where you need to be than when you started, is the measure of our hours and our days.

Hosea’s message to the people was *you’re not where you should be and you’re going the wrong way to get there*. Throughout Hosea, and all the prophets, are lots of harsh words about where that will get you.

Though the words are harsh, they are the words of love. They are the words of love between parent and child. We can understand it, if we think about how we love our children. Parental love is compulsive.

Under the power of ridiculously obsessive, and obsessively ridiculous parental love, our own hearts “recoil” at the thought of any hardship or pain being visited on our dear little monsters. God’s obsession with humanity has led him to constantly muddle about in human affairs, involve divinity in history, mixed with the rabble of the earth and the rubble of our disobedience.

Psychologists would call this “obsessiveness” and “compulsive interference.” The Bible calls this “faith.” Ever since God took that first risky step and created Adam and Eve, God has remained faithful to all descendants of the first family. God is so “obsessed,” so compulsive about the children of creation, that God simply will not leave us to our own poor devices. We may be creatures, but we are creatures that have a hold on God’s heart.

God was so obsessed with reminding us of the divine love
that God gave us the rainbow.

God was so obsessed with finding us a home
that God led Moses and the Israelites out of Egypt.

God was so obsessed with teaching us

that God revealed the Commandments and the Law.

God was so obsessed with guiding us
that God called judges, prophets and kings to speak the divine word.

God was so obsessed with us
that God devised a plan of restoration, a back door way home.

God was so obsessed with us
that God cheated—cheated death, cheated judgment, cheated God's own hand.

God was so obsessed with us that God “gave his only begotten Son that we should not perish but
have everlasting life.”

What kind of creatures are we that return such a magnificent obsession with either complete disregard or, at best, a few mealy-mouthed “thank-yous” mumbled on a Sunday morning? We obsess about our work. We obsess about our weight. We obsess about our status. We obsess about our looks. We obsess about our “things.” We obsess about our bank account.

Do we forget we already have the most-prized of possessions? Our biggest problem has already been solved. Our deepest longings have already been met in fellowship with the Father. Why do we neglect God in pursuit of a plethora of comparatively trivial diversions? Suzan D. Johnson-Cook, put together a collection of devotions by African-American woman. In it, Lynda Seward, a writer in Newark, New Jersey, with a background of ministering to and empowering children from urban dysfunctional families, contributed this entry: “Let's face it. A lifestyle of holiness is not easy. It takes a lot of work to delve deep into the dark abyss of our subconscious mind and awaken all of our crippling past pain, and then allow the Lord to come in and heal and fill us with his constant presence. And to keep on bearing the fruit of the Spirit is a lifelong task. Yet anyone who provides my oxygen, breath, bone and muscle tissue, brain cells, red and white corpuscles, all the neurons, ions, protons that make me tick on a daily basis; who monitors my every emotion, thought process, blood pressure, heart and neurological makeup; who from my birth has known the running count of hair strands on my head (I can't even keep up with how many fall out in daily brushings!); and to top it off, who thinks nothing but lovely thoughts about me all day—deserves the trouble of my bending over backward to do whatever it is this kind of God asks, no matter how long it takes, especially since it is only my best interest God has at heart.”

Hosea asks us, where are we? Are we devoted to God or to lesser gods? Jesus asks the same question and answers it both with his teachings of devotion and his death on the cross for us and our sins. Is the answer you gave when you accepted a daily cross and promised to follow him in the church as fresh as it ever was? Where are you? I hope it is at the foot of our Lord, picking up your cross, accepting your gifts gratefully, and giving them humbly. God loves you. It is in our loving that we live a life worth living now and forever. It's in our loving that we live for God and find Christ in our lives.