

Rev. Dr. Yugo Suzuki's Sermon

8/1/10 **Grace in the Midst of Tragedy Hosea 11:8-9**

One of the most tragic figures in the Old Testament is the prophet named Hosea. Like so many of the prophets, Hosea lived during a time of chaos and upheaval.

The kingdom of David and Solomon had collapsed, and Egypt and Assyria were bearing down on the tattered nation.

To make things worse, his people were backsliding, following idols and breaking commandments left and right.

How would God feel in a situation like this?, says Hosea. Surely God is angry with us.

Hosea goes on. I understand God's anger more than anyone, because I, too, am a victim of betrayal.

What is he talking about? Well, his wife, Gomer, deserted him and their children for young men (notice in the plural) who enticed her with a life of luxury, glamour, and sex.

Hosea is outraged. His jealous anger is expressed in the following heart-wrenching words.

'My wife said, "I am off to see my lovers. They will wine and dine me. Dress and caress me, perfume and adorn me."'

Hosea's anger has no end. "I will fix her. I will strip her naked and expose her as in the day she was born. All her fly by night lovers will not be able to help her. I will punish her. I swear it."

But, in his jealous madness, Hosea learns to pray, "Not my will, but your will be done." In so doing, he realizes that God's mercy is stronger than his anger.

'God is saying to us, "How can I give up on you? How can I leave you in desolation? I can't bear to even think such thoughts. I am not going to act on my anger. I will heal your waywardness. I will love you lavishly. My anger is played out."

What Hosea learned in the midst of the awful darkness is this. Hosea is called to be an instrument of his love and mercy.

This realization transforms Hosea in an incredible way. He goes to the nearby city where Gomer lives as a harlot. Spending his entire fortune, Hosea buys Gomer back.

Listen to his words.

'God ordered me, "Start all over. Love your wife again, your wife who cheated you." So I paid good money to get her back. It cost me my entire fortune. Then I told her, "From now on you are living with me and I am living with you."

This is an amazing story. There is an important lesson for us. Even in the darkest hour, God gives us a chance to be truly human. God gives us a chance to start anew. God is compassionate. We are called to be instruments of his compassion.

It is this knowledge that braces us for the living of these days and gives us the hope, courage, and strength to make our human life truly human.

Thanks be to God.