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Hosea 11:1-11  
Hudson  
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### “No Matter What”

**Introduction:** 2700 years ago the prophets were the official conscience of the people of Israel. They were God’s voice/messenger, bringing people back into line when their thinking about God got fuzzy – or worse yet, when the people went seeking other gods. They were the messengers in pursuit of righteousness, mercy, faithfulness and justice. Their names were Amos, Micah, Jeremiah, Deborah, Isaiah, and Hosea – among others. They got upset when the rich took advantage of the poor, when justice and peace were averted. Usually they were not well liked – because they expected people to change – to turn from going in the wrong direction and turn back toward God. Each prophet had his/her own particular slant on what needed to improve. Hosea’s theme was ‘faithfulness’ – or more accurately – a lack of faithfulness between Israel and God.

The first part of Hosea’s message of God’s faithfulness is portrayed through the metaphor of marriage. Hosea told us about his own relationship with his wife, Gomer – a harlot – a woman who strayed after other men. Yet Hosea remained faithful – pursuing his wife, loving his wife, winning her back in spite of her unfaithfulness. God, says Hosea, loves us this way – completely, faithfully – even when we go pursuing other gods.

Now in today’s lesson the imagery of faithfulness switches from spouse/spouse relationships to the parent/child relationship, as Hosea reminds us how a good parent is faithful, patient, welcoming, and forgiving of a straying child – no matter what. No matter what.  
[TEXT: Hosea 11:1-11]

**SERMON:** God has a problem. Us. People. We’re God’s problem. God is obsessed with us. God won’t leave us alone. God doesn’t seem to be content with letting us be. God isn’t willing to give up on us, no matter how much we mess up. God has a problem – and we’re it. God formed us, breathed life into us, and now is stuck with us. Almost from Day One we, His creatures, dismissed God’s advice and directives on how to behave and figured we could do life our own way. And from Day One God refused to write us off – (even considering that little Flood thing and Noah.) God seems to be obsessed with reaching into our hearts and lives and very souls and claiming us as his own. God seems to be obsessed with restoring in us a right relationship between Creator and Creature. Despite our endless troublemaking, our disobedient attitude, and our obnoxious behavior – God is still so in love with us that he can’t, he won’t let us go.

It is in today’s passage that Hosea equates this obsession with his people to that of parent for a child. Well, at least most parents – toward most children. Any parent knows there will be “those days” when children just aren’t very loveable. Yet, when they’re all tucked in bed at night, and we take a deep breath, our hearts melt in the sheer magnitude of joy and love we feel toward that which we have brought forth and raised up – our child.

But we’re not God – we’re human beings with limits and tolerances. We are people who wonder repeatedly about the boundaries and capabilities we have to forgive – how much we’re

willing to be used – to be challenged or deliberately disobeyed. Is there a time when a parent says to the child, “You messed up so badly – I no longer call you my child. I no longer love you.” Are there boundaries we hold on our love? Are there limits that can’t be crossed? Could your child do something to make you stop loving him? Could your parents have ever stopped loving you?

Try to imagine....it’s Sunday morning, my 19 year old son didn’t come home Saturday night, after meeting up with some friends. It’s pre cell-phone days, remember. I need to get to church, but what about my son? The phone rings. “Mom...”

“Jon, are you ok? Where are you?”

..... *I’m sitting on the curb outside the Canton jail – can you come get me?*

What? Are you ok? *Yeah, I’m ok*

Where’s the car? *Impound lot*

What happened? *I think I just got lost.*

What did you do? *Mom, I messed up.*

Is anyone hurt? *No, I just need a ride... can you come?*

Jon, it’s Sunday. I’ve got church.... I can be there before noon... *Ok mom.*

Jon, I love you. *I love you too mom.*

Can’t you hear the anguish in this passage as God cries out, “O Israel, I carried you in my arms, held you to my breast, watched you toddle, I taught you to walk and ride a bike, sent you off to school. We’ve always been so close – and now you are so rebellious, thinking you can go your own way, do things I’ve told you not to do, find a different truth than that which I so painstakingly taught you. You think you no longer have to heed my warnings. You are so willful – so rebellious. (Any of this sounding familiar?)

Does a parent ever stop loving her child? Is there ever a time when a parent says to the child, “I can no longer love you.....” Do we ever stop loving our children? That’s what today’s lesson from Hosea the prophet is about. Through the eyes of the prophet, we see how God reacted when his child Israel went astray, went looking for other gods.... other parents, if you will. There is a big difference between loving our child, and letting our child suffer the consequences of his/her own behavior.

God gave breath to Israel, God had been faithful, God called Israel out of slavery, God said to them I will be your God and you will be my people, God created a covenant – a promise of belonging... I held you, comforted you, lifted you to my cheek, bent down to feed you – and this is how you repay me? Now, the more I call you, the more you go away.

Can you picture God standing at the back door, calling Israel home to supper, but she’s off chasing her own dreams, pursuing her own agenda, sitting down to supper at someone else’s table .... After all you’ve done for her.

According to the laws set down in Deuteronomy 21:18-21 a rebellious and willful adolescent is to be stoned by the town elders. Whoa. Even when we remember that these rules were established during the time of desert wandering, when the people could not afford to have wayward teens distracting them from survival it still seems harsh.

So Hosea is reminding them, that even though they may be acting like rebellious teens who deserve death – who deserve to be sent back into slavery, to know the pain of exile and separation from God – you’ve ignored all God has done for you...how could you be so ungrateful as to turn to the other gods. If you want Baal, and think you’d be better off with Baal, then go to Baal. If you don’t like it here – fine. Pursue your own course. See how that works for you.

But that isn’t what God said. A remarkable thing happens when we think God might just be frustrated enough to give up on us. He says, “Oh my child, how can I give you up! And the memories flood back. I can’t give you up – no matter what, you have broken my heart, but you are my child.

At our staff meeting last Tuesday, we were reflecting on this passage and I asked, “do you think your child could ever do anything you would stop loving him for?” Someone suggested they thought they could forgive their child anything – except if the child severely harmed or hurt another of her children. She didn’t think she could get beyond that. But that’s exactly what God did when we hurt his Son, killed his son. God didn’t back off. God didn’t stop loving us. God just can’t seem to leave us alone. And for our part? How do we repay God? We come here and give thanks and live our lives in constant thanks and praise for all God has done for us, don’t we?

Indeed God knows what is best for us? Can we always be so certain of what is best for our child? If they never wander off and try new things, how do they learn? If they never suffer the consequences of their own behavior, if they are always bailed out, how do they learn? Of course, God did let Israel wander. God watched with broken heart as his children pursued other lives. But he never gives up on us. God’s love remains. We can always come home, we can always pull up to the Table and be nourished by the bread and cup set before us – life, truth, love.

No matter what, God is here. Is there something we could do to God to break God’s heart? Yes. Will God ever give up on us? No. That’s our promise – no matter what, God will not let us go. And so with our own children we have this example – always a place to come home, always a place of welcome. Come to the table and be nourished. Come to the Table – and be welcomed. Amen.