

A Wedding, A Bride Named Gomer, & A Funeral

ME

Seasons... Something we don't have much of around here in the good 'ole Ohio Valley...

I enjoy the actual changing of the seasons (when it actually occurs), especially that of the change from summer to fall.

When summer comes to an end and autumn begins, many exciting and enjoyable things take place...

- *temperatures begin cooling off

- *the leaves on the trees begin changing

- *people begin reaching in the closet for their ugly sweaters (you know which ones I am talking about)

- *children return to the full-swing of school with a sense of newness, excitement, moving forward, and sometimes even apprehension.

All in all, the changing of seasons is a great time...

WE

We have actually just completed a season here at St. James Church...

Did you know that?

As of this past Wednesday, when we celebrated Ash Wednesday, we moved from the Church Season of Epiphany into the season of Lent.

During Epiphany, we engaged in our POP study, which pointed us to the very reason for Epiphany itself – that Christ was revealed to the world as Lord and King, and that He is revealed to the world as such by us, the church, today. As a matter of fact, we saw clearly in His Word that it is our responsibility and joy to do so!

Today, though our calling to reveal Jesus to those badly in need of Epiphany does not change, our season does...

The temperature is changing. It is time to bring out a different sweater – one made of sackcloth and burlap, covered with ashes. Change is in the air – It is a sense of newness, excitement, moving forward, and YES, even some apprehension...

You see, Lent is more somber, a more reflective, a more personal for you and I than even the previous season where we discussed our calling from the Lord to share the Good News.

For it is in Lent that we reflect on our own reactions to the revelation of Jesus Christ as Lord; We reflect on our response and reaction to the Biblical mandate to share Jesus; We examine our motives in coming to church, doing ministry, being involved in religion, really doing everything that we do, being who we are...

In Lent, as we anticipate the celebration of Easter and what Christ has done for us by laying His life down on the cross and again taking it back up – we take a good, painful, hard look at our own lives to see just who we are, what we have done, what the state of our heart is, and why Jesus was indeed revealed as Savior and Lord for us...

During Lent, we celebrate the very humanity of the God-man Jesus Christ, AND we take a deep, deep look at the reason Jesus Christ, God Himself became human, or as the Scripture says, “dwelt (or pitched His tent) among us.”

During Lent, the humanity of Jesus the Lord prompts us to examine our hearts and lives for the sin that lurks within each of us – the sin that caused a holy God to pursue us without restraint; the sin which prompted the King of kings and Lord of lords to lower Himself, become a man, and suffer for us – **THE VERY SIN FROM WHICH EACH OF US MUST ACTIVELY REPENT** (or turn away from), if we are to receive newness of life.

St. James Church, this is Lent – that we would turn from our personal and corporate (or church) sins and run toward the Lord Jesus Christ who pursues us relentlessly with His loving grace and forgiveness!

GOD

This is the very call of Jesus Himself, as recorded by Mark in his Gospel...

In the first chapter of Mark's Gospel, after he summarizes the path Jesus took to begin His ministry (including the preaching of repentance by John the Baptizer, the baptism of Jesus, the audible and visible endorsement of Jesus by the Father and the Holy Spirit, and His temptation by Satan in the wilderness), Mark says that Jesus went into Galilee preaching the following message, found in Mark 1: 15:

“The time promised by God has come at last!” Jesus announced. “The Kingdom of God is near! Repent of your sins and believe the Good News!”

While we were stuck in our own sin, God became man and delivered to us the only message which could save us from ourselves: *Turn away from your sin, and follow Jesus Christ!*

Beloved, this is the relentless pursuing of God for you!

Today, we begin a 5-week study of a prophet from the Old Testament, who by his experience & painful understanding of the pursuing of a holy God after a wayward people, will lead us on a journey to better understanding of the need to turn from our sin and turn to Jesus, the Son of the Living God who “pitched His tent among us” in order that we might find relief and redemption for those very sins.

Hosea 1: 1

The prophet Hosea will lead us on a journey through Lent, which will be quite complimentary to our Wednesday evening Lent activities, which I invite you, your loved ones, and your enemies to participate in...

Now, we all like a good object lesson. That is why many of us listen more during the children's sermon than we do during the “big sermon.”

Prophets throughout the Word of God did some odd things to teach lessons to God's people. Isaiah walked the streets dressed like a prisoner of war, making folks uncomfortable for 3 years. For months, Jeremiah carried an actual yoke (made for oxen and farm animals) on his shoulders. Ezekiel was quite the connoisseur of object lessons, acting like a little boy “playing war,” using a haircut

as a theological object lesson, and sermonizing his own wife's death for the good of God's people.

Sometimes God's people become so deaf to His Word that He must speak uniquely, peculiarly, and in loud action in order to get their attention.

Such was the case with Mr. Hosea...

As we will see in the coming weeks, Hosea's living illustration of God's work in and toward His people was no children's sermon.

God's people of Israel had, like so many times before, become caught up in their culture and forgotten the Lord. As a matter of fact, the people of Israel had become so familiar and comfortable with the culture that they had taken on unnecessary and sinful parts of it as their own, turning completely away from the Lord.

The circumstances behind Hosea may be found both in his book of prophecy, as well as in 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles. I encourage you to take some time and study those to better understand what was happening.

Baal worship was the prominent religion of the time. Baal was known locally, especially in the Syria-Palestine area, as the "weather god" who had control over agriculture, fertility of the land, rainfall and productivity. Since Israel (the northern kingdom to whom this was primarily addressed) had always been an agricultural society, the people jumped onboard and bought into Baal worship lock, stock, and barrel.

Besides being convenient for the farming Israelites, Baal worship also brought with it some decadent pleasures for a people quickly sliding down the slippery slope of sin and destruction. There were some very bizarre and deeply disturbing practices such as bestiality, human sacrifice, incest, and mutilations associated with the worship of this Baal. The Israelites were also very happy to buy into some of the other overtly immoral "worship" activities connected with Baalism, such as prostitution and inappropriate intimacy at the pagan shrines built for this false god.

By this point in history (under Jeroboam's rule), God had had enough!

God's calls for His people to turn from their sin and return to Him had been ignored long enough. They had chosen filth over His glory; temporary pleasure over promised grace and goodness, **and the Lord was over it!**

Into this volatile time, this sinful situation, this great season for an opportunity much like our Lent, steps the prophet Hosea.

AND, does Hosea really step into a situation! God is getting ready to rock Hosea's world as an illustration of the lengths that He is willing to go to in order to pursue His people for the purpose of their restoration.

YOU

Friends, we have entered the season of Lent, and have we really stepped into a situation!

This is no easy season. It is no small task to look into our own souls, asking the Lord to reveal our sin by His Spirit in order that we may do the hard work of dealing with it, disposing of it, and running from it toward Jesus.

But, easy or not; BIG or small, like Hosea and the people of Israel, we find ourselves here in Lent. Are we willing to make the most of it? Are we willing to use this season for the purpose in which it was instituted and placed in the church calendar – SELF-EXAMINATION and TURNING AWAY FROM OUR SIN?

The very Word of God which we heard read by the liturgist tells us that we are not alone in this task:

1 Peter 3: 18 says:

Christ suffered for our sins once for all time. He never sinned, but he died for sinners to bring you safely home to God. He suffered physical death, but he was raised to life in the Spirit.

Are you ready to continue on this Lent journey, started this past Ash Wednesday?

I look forward to studying the Book of Hosea with you...

Are you up for the growth that will come in your life as you turn from our personal and we turn from our church-wide sins and run toward the Lord Jesus Christ who pursues us relentlessly with His Good News?