

A Faithful Bride

Adrian D. Van Breda

Sermon prepared for **26 February 2006**,
seventh sermon.

Reading: **Hosea 2:2-23 and Psalm 103**
(15 minutes)

Theme: *"God calls us to be a faithful bride"*

Case Study

- Clients of a few years ago
- Attractive, middle aged, children, nice lifestyle
- He engages in repeated affairs
- Her self-esteem drops – depression
- He gains insight during therapy, but can't abandon his relationships
- Marriage eventually crumbles

Reflection

- Adultery is terribly difficult to work with in therapy
- Betrayal and pain is deep
- Trust very hard to regain
- How would you feel if your partner cheated on you?ⁱ

Historical Context

- Our Old Testament reading talks about adultery
- Hosea was a prophet in about 780 BC
- Contemporary of Jonah and Isaiah
- He prophesied to Jeroboam II, one of the last kings of the Northern Kingdom
- Israel had fallen away from God, and adopted other false Gods, like Baal
- Yet Israel also very prosperous
- Jeroboam regained much land for Israel, like in the days of David & Solomon
- Hosea speaks into this situation

Parable of Adultery

- Hosea (chp 1) tells how he married Gomer, who turns out to be adulterous
- She has three children, presumably all with different men
- Of course, Gomer is a symbol for Israel – who has committed adultery against God
- Her children all have symbolic names:
 - Jezreel refers to a battle in which Israel killed their enemies wantonly
 - Lo-Ruhamah means 'Not loved'
 - Lo-Ammi means 'Not my people'
- In chp 2 we learn of Hosea's judgement on Gomer = God's judgement on Israel

Our Adultery

- Are we an adulterous wife to God? How are we like Gomer? Like Israel?
- How have you cheated on God?
- Let me suggest three ways that we, as a parish, have committed adultery.

Lack of Surrender

- **Problem.** We haven't surrendered to God
- **Analogy.** We're married in community of property, but we've kept a little nest egg hidden 'just in case'
- **Examples.** We squabble over petty things and relationships
- We are overly self-sufficient –
- Relying on our resources, intelligence, privileged position to get by
- We are sufficiently prosperous that we can get away with not being utterly dependent on God
- **God's Desire.** What God wants from us is to need Him absolutely, to turn to Him for help with everything, to make Him a central part of our lives

Inward Looking

- **Problem.** We are excessively inward looking
- **Analogy.** We want to remain in the marital bed for as long as possible
- Don't want to go out and live out our marriage in the world
- **Examples.** We spend so much time considering our own faith that we have little concern for those in need
- What outreach do we really have?
- Most outreach is 'easy' outreach – money and food
- Where do we get our hands dirty?
- Where do we invest our time, energy and effort?
- Where do we really extend ourselves?
- **God's Desire.** God wants us to use our marriage to Him as a platform from which to make a real difference in the world, through sharing his love with people in personal and tangible ways

Hoarding the Gospel

- **Problem.** We are reluctant to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ
- **Analogy.** Like we're married but don't want anyone to know about it
- The marriage is so private that people don't even know we're married
- We don't wear a wedding ring
- **Examples.** EEIII last year – no names put up
- Maybe it was timing, etc. But most likely, our reluctance to share the Gospel
- Do we believe we have a gospel to proclaim?
- Is our faith objectively real in any way?
- Do we really have something to offer the world spiritually?
- **God's Desire.** God wants us to be so excited and transformed by our relationship with Him, that we cannot help but share it with people with whom we come in contact on a daily basis.
- All of these corporate sins, with our individual sins, constitute adultery
- When we become Christians – get confirmed – we enter into a marriage contract with Jesus
- Yet we have been unfaithful to God.

God's Faithfulness

- But:
 - The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love.
 - He will not always accuse, nor will he harbour his anger forever;
 - He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities.
 - For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him;
 - As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.
 - As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him. (Ps 103: 8-13)
- God is a most amazing husband/lover
- He remains faithful even when we are faithless
 - I will betroth you to me for ever; I will betroth you in righteousness and justice, in love and compassion.
 - I will betroth you in faithfulness, and you will acknowledge the Lord. (Hos 2: 19-20)
- God is always waiting for our return
- His arms are always open
- His heart is always willing to forgive
- No matter how adulterous we've been, he actively seeks us out and endeavours to reconcile us to him
- He brings his righteousness, justice, love, compassion and faithfulness into the marriage, and because we're married in community of property, we get a full share of it – it becomes as much ours as his.
 - He forgives all our sins and heals all our diseases
 - He redeems our life from the pit and crowns us with love and compassion
 - He satisfies our desires with good things, so that our youth is renewed like the eagle's. (Ps 103: 3-5)

Call to Faithfulness

- As we enter the period of Lent – 40 days leading up to Easter – let us examine our lives, both individually and as a body
- Recognise and face up to our adultery
- Let's be honest
- Let us return to our marriage
- Let us reconfirm our marriage vows
- Let us be a faithful bride
- Because, when we do, God promises:
 - I will respond. I will respond to the skies and they will respond to the earth
 - And the earth will respond to the grain, the new wine and the oil
 - And they will respond to Israel.
 - I will plant her for myself in the land;
 - I will show my love to the one I called "not my loved one"
 - I will say to those called "Not my people", "You are my people"
 - And they will say, "You are my God" (Hos 2: 21-23)
- Amen

Amen.

ⁱ Here I want to elicit a strong emotional response, and to help listeners identify and sympathise with the betrayed partner – who is God in the Hosea reading. Like Nathan's confrontation of David, we are the adulterous party!