**December 8th 2024 Second Sunday in Advent**

**Text: Hosea 4:6, 6:1-3** 0752

**Theme: The Value of Knowledge.**

May the Spirit of God ever move us to grow in knowledge and grace, that like growing children we may move from milk to meat and receive the sustenance necessary for our spiritual development. Amen. Dear people of God: Last Sunday we began our new series of sermons focusing on the minor prophets of the Old Testament. We began this series looking at the first of these minor prophets, the book of Hosea. As we considered the opening chapters we noted a very strange command given by God to the prophet: to take a prostitute for his wife. She was a woman who would be unfaithful to him, but God desired that Hosea love her in spite of her adulterous ways, similar to God’s continued love for us in spite of our adulterous ways. Today we continue to look at the prophecies of Hosea building upon what we have already seen, for as all the book of the Bible are, it is not a collection of unconnected and independent prophecies, but each is interconnected with the others and with the entirety of Scripture. Thus today we build upon what we learned last Sunday, understanding the work of Christ for His bride, but also the necessity of repentance, and of the work of sanctification in the life of a Christian. The question is often asked, how did the Israelites, and very often the visible church on earth, fall into such a cycle of failure and faithfulness? What caused them to distrust God? What led to their captivity in Babylon? Can this same cycle be avoided by future generations of Christians?

These questions will be answered today, and it is my prayer that we, as a congregation and generation of Christians, can learn from what we see happening in the book of Hosea, and lean not on our own understanding, but on the Lord our righteousness for help in these perilous times. Now I believe that we are living through a time very similar to the time of the prophet Hosea. The visible church today is in utter disarray, for there are false prophets within her, there are idols set up which destroy faith, there are false Saviors put forward; in short spiritual adultery is readily available for each Christian to engage in, and Satan has succeeded in putting these things before the eyes of the church on earth, and tempted her to apostasy. Much of the visible church today is far more concerned with making sure the numbers in their membership roles are full than in presenting to the people the person of Jesus Christ and the Gospel; likewise they are far more concerned with how many dollars can be garnered in the offering plate each week, implementing schemes to extort every cent that they can from the congregation, then they are with having members who sorrow over their sin and are comforted by the hope of forgiveness and salvation. Spiritual apathy is rampant today, where a good amount of those who belong or attend a church do so with little regard for what is taught, and little desire to add to their knowledge of the Word of God which saves their souls. This is akin to having access to knowledge which guarantees wealth, and we ignore it, or dabble in it, but refuse to learn all that we can. In the same way the very riches and wealth of heaven, of God’s wisdom are available, and yet all too often we ignore it, we refuse to learn of it, and prefer rather to engage in anything else. Today we will look at the teaching of God through Hosea concerning the cause of those wicked things we often endure, and the solution to them. Let us then see these things according to our text for today which is found in the fourth and sixth chapters of the book of the prophet Hosea.

**Quote text here.**

O Lord and Savior, Thou who dost provide all things necessary for us to Thy clean and perfect bride, grant Thy Holy Spirit unto us that we may recognize wherein our falls come from, and how they can be averted. Grant us wisdom and knowledge which are true and real, that we not become victims of our own apathy or indifference, but that these be overcome by Thy power and might in Thy Word. Keep us from thinking that we know all that we need to know, or that there is nothing more that we can learn, or that we Thou hast no kore knowledge to impart to us. Teach us that our sanctification is never static, but rather it is either increasing or declining. Help us to put away our sin, and bring forth the divine fruits of divine wisdom, increasing in the faith which saves our souls, and the grace to be humble and acknowledge our need to be taught of Thee. Look upon this congregation, O Lord, and give each person here hunger for the wisdom Thou hast provided in Thy Word; give us zeal to spread that same knowledge, that is, for iron to sharpen iron. Come unto us, O Lord, and make Thy home within our hearts that we may always be and act like Thy people. Grant these things unto us always here in this life, and bring us home through the same, in Thine own saving name. Amen.

Guided then by the Spirit of God let us learn of the value of knowledge, seeing first that:

1. **Without it we are destroyed.** We read chapter four, verse six of our text: **read verse here.** God Himself tells us just exactly the cause of the spiritual adultery that the Israelites were engaged in, and the cause was lack of knowledge. And what knowledge exactly did they lack? He says that they had forgotten His Law. Quicker than anything else, lack of knowledge of our own sinfulness will lead to spiritual adultery, because when we feel good about ourselves and about our own conduct, we forget what need we have of the knowledge of God. In other words our faith begins to weaken, for faith is trust in the forgiveness of sins. Jesus told this parable to a Pharisee: *“There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most? Simon answered and said, I suppose that he, to whom he forgave the most. And He said unto him, thou hast rightly judged.” (Luke 7:41-43)* Here Jesus shows to us exactly what we do here in this building each Sunday, we are dealing with a disease, a contagious disease which effects everyone, and we here must acknowledge that we are sick. We can only acknowledge the fact of our sickness when we have the knowledge of what exactly it is that makes us sick. Now there is a very large segment of the visible church that says Christians do not need God’s Law anymore. However, there should be no one more aware of their own sin than a Christian, for a Christian is one who has had his large amount of debt forgiven by God. It is necessary then for each of us to turn inwardly and examine ourselves in the light and mirror of God’s holy Law. When we do so we will find without a doubt the heavenly wisdom that we are horrific people who have done unspeakable things. And yet this is still not the highest knowledge. *“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” (Ps. 111:10)* Here we have a direct correlation between the knowledge of the Law and the saving knowledge of faith. Conversion is the beginning of wisdom, but when something has a beginning, it is then implied that that is not the end. God does not intend for a person to be converted and then he ceases to grow. Think of a converted person as an infant Christian. He is just born, as Jesus said: *“Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” (John 3:3)* Now when that infant is born in the faith through conversion, then that infant must be nourished, he must be fed and taught, or else he is destined to die. It is like any infant who is born into this world, if necessary sustenance is withheld then he will die. Now as the child is fed milk from his mother he grows, he develops and learns, but soon he is to be weaned from the milk and given solid food. The writer to the Hebrews says this same thing: *“Ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskillful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of a full age.” (Heb. 5:12-14)* The prophecy we have in Hosea shows the result of those who, being converted, are content to remain as babies in the knowledge of God, and since they receive no sustenance are destroyed in the faith. Hosea taches that apathy amongst those who are in the faith leads to what we see at the time of Hosea’s prophetical work, for apathy is of the devil and our own sinful flesh. Thus do we see the value of knowledge, for without it we are destroyed, but:
2. **With it we are saved.** We read verses one through three of chapter six of our text: **read verses here.** Notice the terms used in verse one of this portion of our text, God has torn, and God has smitten, but God will heal and bind our wounds. Now many take this as God is punishing us when bad things happen in our lives, like when we have medical struggles, or when a child is born with problems, or when we have difficult financial times. Yet our text is speaking nothing of earthly, physical ailments or sufferings, for the adultery is spiritual and so is the tearing and smiting. Now often God will allow those types of things to get our attention, but they are not punishments for sin, but rather a call to repentance. Remember that Satan was the cause of all of Job’s suffering, but God allowed it. What though is the purpose? It is not to cause suffering, but to show grace and to receive glory. The disciples made the mistake of assuming that certain sins are the direct cause of certain suffering. Hear this exchange between Jesus and His disciples: *“and as Jesus passed by , He saw a man which was blind from his birth. And His disciples asked Him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind? Jesus answered, neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him.” (John 9:1-3)* God through Hosea then, is teaching the Israelites that in the continued reception of God’s wisdom through His Word, that they are healed. Nothing is said concerning their earthly lives getting better, nor that suffering on earth will cease, though they are now right with God, but that they will be healed from the swift blade of God’s Law as it pierces through them.

Verse two of this chapter is quite fascinating. After two days He will revive us, in the third day He will raise us up. This is obviously alluding to the resurrection of Christ from the dead, but notice that our sorrow in contrition, our spiritual ‘death’ is for three days, but afterward we are raised up. The resurrection of Jesus from the dead as payment for our sin is the same as the condition our souls are in before conversion, or when we have fallen from faith due to apathy. It is no secret to the members here how I was raised and how I fell from the faith in my late teen years and early adult life. But one thing God taught me in the years following that was that my fall from faith was due to my apathy toward the Word of God. I didn’t care to learn, I didn’t care to hear what God had to say, I figured, though not necessarily consciously, that I was covered. I would go to church from time to time, and I would crack the pages on my Bible once in while, and that was enough, or so I thought. But due to my own negligence I fell, and I fell hard. However, God used the outward circumstances to bring me to a point where I learned of the necessity of God’s wisdom. Following that God continued to push me to learn more and more and to continue to grow in His grace. Dear Christians, none of this is to say that you are apathetic; but if you find that you are, please learn from what I here tell you: faith is a living thing, and if neglected will die. Don’t let your faith die, but use what things God gave for our growth that you may receive the meat rather than simply the milk, and the Spirit will sustain and grow your faith. Make His Word your priority. Wake up hearing Him and communing with Him, go to bed hearing Him and communing with Him. I cant say that the outward circumstances in my life would have been different if I had faithfully continued in His Word and wisdom, but I can say that if I had continued in His Word, the things I endured would have been easier, for the comfort of God would have been applied and I would have remained in hope.

May the Lord urge you to continue in His Word and sacraments and to increase in the saving knowledge of Him and His works. May God continue to be gracious unto us and to keep us in the true faith to everlasting life. Grant, O Lord, Thy continued favor unto us, and give each of us a double portion of Thy Spirit to hunger after the knowledge which will bring us to heaven. Amen.