

**PARK HILL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH  
FOURTH SUNDAY OF PENTECOST  
REV. JOHN L. THOMPSON  
“LIVING WITH A BROKEN HEART”  
Matthew 9:9-13  
Hosea 6:3-6  
June 8, 2008  
10:00 A.M. Service**

Brokenness is often a spiritual condition. Evil expresses itself in brokenness where there needs to be solidarity. Sin inevitably results in broken promises, broken lives, and broken relationships.

People may become religious as a way of avoiding suffering. The Christian faith is sometimes understood to claim that, because Jesus has suffered for our sins, his followers don't have to suffer. To the contrary, suffering is inevitable both in the human condition and in the Christian life. Faith is a resource for enduring suffering.

A broken heart is the most painful human injury we can sustain. What hurts more than when love fails us? Break any other part of me and it is easier to endure than when you break my heart. There are more broken hearts here than any of us would imagine. At some time, and to some degree, love has let us down. Lovers hurt each other, often because “being in love” is such a self-centered emotion. Marriage partners hurt each other, because marriage at its best isn't always easy and requires more acceptance than most of us can muster. Parents hurt children. Children hurt parents. Friends hurt friends, because jealousy can creep into some tight places. If we are not hurt by another person, we are hurt because our cause failed, or our fortune turned, or we got ground up by some ungodly and inhuman system. Right now, Hillary Clinton is hurting. Who here can present an undamaged, unabused, unbroken heart?

Hosea and the suffering of God.

Hosea was a gentle prophet, unlike Amos, who was a tiger. Just as the people often betrayed God, Hosea's wife, Gomer, left him to become a prostitute. The story of Hosea's heartbreak parallels God's own sorrow over Israel's unfaithfulness. From Hosea we can learn some lessons about living with a broken heart.

When you have a broken heart, it does not necessarily mean you are being punished. Of course, you may be! At least, you may be experiencing the consequences of irresponsible action. But *all* suffering is not punishment. Hosea was a good man. His pain was not the punishment of God. Both biblical history and Christian history show that often the godliest people are the ones who suffer most. We should not complicate our experiences of suffering by adding the ingredient of guilt. When your heart is breaking, it doesn't necessarily mean you are being punished.

Even in our worst suffering, God is still God. God can still be trusted. We know that God's great purpose is to fashion us in the image of Christ, but the details of God's purposes are a mystery to us. Sometime there simply are no answers to the question, why? This does not change who God is. God is still the loving Father of our Lord and savior Jesus Christ. As children we often did not understand the parental perspective! We learned, it is hoped, that parents have higher goals for us than keeping us constantly happy. As Christians we must not base our faith on what happens to us. Circumstances change, from good to bad, from bad to good. We may see later how confused we were about what was good and what was bad. Circumstances change, but God remains the same. When your heart is breaking it does not necessarily mean you are being punished.

When your heart is breaking it does not mean there is no hope. Sometimes there are more important things than healing, and there is always hope whether there is healing or not. The writer Flannery O'Connor was a devout Catholic. As a young woman, full of giftedness and promise, she was diagnosed with lupus. There would be no cure, and she would die young. However, she discovered in many ways, she said, that *healing and grace are not the same thing*. She found amazing grace, but healing was not to be hers. Grace is God's loving, redemptive presence in our lives, whatever comes. God is always doing things in our lives that are more important than what we think is important. God often wants more for us than the kinds of deliverance we want. The victory we have in Jesus Christ is not always the victory we think we need. It is the victory of self-giving,

sacrificial love. It is the victory of grace over all our circumstances, not changing our circumstances, necessarily, but redeeming them. God didn't take away the cross from Jesus. But see what a victory grace won through the cross! Think about it, sometimes when the deliverance you wanted has not come, you have ended up finding more of grace, more of God, and even more of yourself than you would have if the deliverance had come. When you have a broken heart, it does not mean there is no hope. Hosea suffered horrific betrayal and loss, yet in the end his beloved was restored to him.

When your heart is breaking, just remember what good company you are in. One reason God can be trusted with our pain is that God knows firsthand about broken hearts. Listen to the words Hosea puts in the mouth of God. ***“When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. The more I called them, the more they went from me. ... Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk, I took them up in my arms ... I led them with cords of human kindness, with bands of love. I was to them like those who lift infants to their cheeks. I bent down to them and fed them. ... My people are bent on turning away from me. ... How can I give you up, Ephraim?”*** Over and over God has experienced the pain of broken-heartedness.

The healing of broken hearts.

When love has broken our hearts, only love can heal them. When we have been failed by love, or rejected by love, or betrayed by love it hurts, but I assure you, only genuine love can heal us. God did a most unlikely thing with Hosea. God sent him to find his faithless wife, Gomer, and to buy her back from her life as a harlot. God didn't say, ***“Forgive her, if she comes back.”*** God said, ***“Go and get her.”*** God said, ***“Love her despite all she has done to destroy your love.”*** God can say this because God does this. Even when we do not seek God, God seeks us. A little boy came in from a game of hide-and-seek in tears. His father, a rabbi, asked what was wrong. The son explained that, when he had hidden himself, no one had come looking for him. The rabbi embraced his son and said perhaps now the boy could better understand how God feels.

If you have to learn to live with a broken heart, or perhaps you had to do so in the past, you not very far from understanding God's love for you. Perhaps in your personal experience of broken-heartedness is your best opportunity to understand God, Perhaps in your broken-heartedness you are

actually closest to the heart of God. Resurrection is a sign of the many wonders our redeeming God can accomplish with a broken heart, and sometimes *only* with a broken heart.

The Christian faith does not provide a way around suffering, but a way through it. Throughout the New Testament, both by precept and by example, Christians are taught that the cost of discipleship is often paid in suffering and privation. Yet the promised victory of the faithful is realized through their endurance and patience. The cross of Christ reveals that there is a cross in the heart of God. It is true of God, of Christ, and of Christ's followers that to love is to suffer. I close with these words from Thomas Shepherd:

Must Jesus bear the cross alone,  
and all the world go free?  
No, there's a cross for everyone,  
and there's a cross for me.

How happy are the saints above,  
who once went sorrowing here!  
But now they taste unmingled love,  
and joy without a tear.

The consecrated cross I'll bear  
till death shall set me free;  
and then go home my crown to wear,  
for there's a crown for me.

The Christian faith does not provide a way around suffering, but a way through it. I would love to help guide you through it, because I would love to be your pastor. I would love for this to be your church.