

Title: Prone to Wander

Sunday, August 7, 2005 – First Baptist Church, Jefferson City, Missouri

Text: Hosea 13:4-6; 14:1-8

Rev. Melissa Hatfield

They met their junior year of high school. It was a cool Tuesday night in early March and the varsity basketball team was playing its biggest rival for the district title. It had been an exciting season for the tiny community of Rockridge and every person in town had crammed the little 2A school gym for the big game. The bleachers were a sea of green and white as the community displayed their team colors proudly. The thunderous cheers were pierced with the squeaks of sneakers and the shrill of whistles.

Tim played “the” trumpet in the little pep band and on the last strand of the school fight song which he knew by heart, he peered over the end of his trumpet at the crowd in the visitors section. As he panned down the third row, there at the end of his trumpet was Kate. Her smile was dazzling, her spirit contagious. She was decked out in red from head to toe and her face was painted for war. Tim was taken with her from the moment he saw her.

Through the remainder of the game, Tim kept an eye on Kate – missing half of his cues on the songs that night. And when the final buzzer went off, Tim made a beeline across the court, trumpet in hand. The home town team didn’t win that night, but Tim did.

Tim and Kate dated the remainder of their junior year as well as their senior year and these years were filled with wonderful memories. The movie dates, the basketball games where Kate cheered as loudly for the pep band of the rival school as she did her own school’s team, their senior prom.

After their senior year, Tim and Kate made the difficult decision to attend different schools but promised to stay committed to one another and the special relationship they had discovered. Tim was steadfast in his commitment and love for Kate. Kate, however, was distracted by new adventures and new possibilities. She was lonely and

impatient. Tim was miles away but Jason wasn't. As her attachment to Jason grew, Kate's detachment from Tim grew as well. Tim could sense that he was losing Kate but remained faithful and full of love for her even when he found out about Jason. But it wasn't enough to keep Kate. They broke up their sophomore year of college.

*“Yet I have been the Lord your God ever since the Land of Egypt;
you know no God but me, and besides me there is no savior.
It was I who fed you in the wilderness, in the land of drought.
When I fed them, they were satisfied; they were satisfied,
and their heart was proud; therefore they forgot me.”*

– Hosea 13:4-6

Tim and Kate didn't talk much the remainder of their college years. Tim returned home each summer to work in his father's insurance business. Kate spent her summers with friends, energized by the new adventures they found together. Although Tim never dated, Kate dated often but never very seriously or for very long. Graduation came for both Tim and Kate. Tim returned to Rockridge to work alongside his father in the family business. Kate earned a degree in Public Relations but wasn't quite ready to settle into the working world. She returned home that summer to stay with her mom while she tried to figure out where she was going.

It had been four years since Kate had last seen Tim. But when she walked into the front lobby of Stewart Insurance Company and saw Tim, she felt like she had come home. Her memories of Tim were full of love and safety and when her eyes met Tim, she was reminded of those feelings. And Tim did indeed still love Kate and felt an indescribable joy when he saw her standing in the doorway. They began to visit again over coffee several days a week; then over dinner. Before long, they were spending most days together and their relationship was stronger and deeper than it had ever been before.

“Therefore, I will now allure her [God's people], and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her. From there I will give her her vineyards, and make the Valley of

Achor a door of hope. There she shall respond as in the days of her youth, as at the time when she came out of the land of Egypt. On that day, says the Lord, you will call me, "My husband" and no longer will you call me, "My Baal". And I will take you for my wife forever; I will take you for my wife in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love, and in mercy. I will take you for my wife in faithfulness; and you shall know the Lord. I will say to "Not My People", "You are my people." And he shall say to me, "You are my God."

Hosea 2:14-16; 19-20; 23

The wedding day was beautiful. A small gathering of friends and family at the Rockridge Gardens where, under the glow of the sun and the love of those gathered, Tim and Kate vowed to cherish and honor one another for the rest of their lives. They were happy. They were full of hope as they embraced sharing their lives together.

Everything was exciting and new and Tim and Kate cherished their moments together as husband and wife. Over the next four years, they had built a home, gave birth to a son and developed a contented and safe relationship. Tim loved his wife and cherished her. Kate truly loved Tim, as well, but her restlessness returned. She fought it. She berated herself for not cherishing a husband who cherished her the way so many women dream of being cherished. But her head and her heart went searching.

"O Israel, come back! Return to your God! You're down but you're not out. Prepare your confession and come back to God. Pray to him, "Take away our sin, and accept our confession. Receive as restitution our repentant prayers. We'll never again say, "our god" to something we've made or made up. You're our last hope. Is it not true that in you the orphan finds mercy?

And God says, "I will heal their waywardness. I will love them lavishly. My anger is played out. I will make a fresh start with Israel. He'll burst into bloom like a crocus in the spring. He'll put down deep oak tree roots, he'll become a forest of oaks! He'll become splendid – like a giant sequoia, his fragrance like a grove of cedars! Those who live near him will be blessed by him, be blessed and prosper like golden grain. Everyone

*will be talking about them, spreading their fame as the vintage children of God.
Ephraim is finished with gods that are no-gods. From now on, I'm the one who answers
and satisfies him.*

I am like a luxuriant fruit tree. Everything you need is to be found in me.”

- Hosea 14 (the Message)

Tim loved Kate deeply but he knew Kate was prone to wander – in search of something that would satisfy her. Tim knew she would never find it where she was looking. He let her go, loved her always but never took her back.

God loves us deeply but he knows we are prone to wander – in search of something that will satisfy us. God knows we won't find it where we are looking but he lets us go, loves us always **but** God stands ready at every moment to take us back.

A few years ago, I did a word study on the word “zanah” which is the Hebrew word for “prostitute” or “harlot”. You may be surprised to know as I was that the most common use of the word “harlot” in Scripture is in reference to Israel, God's people. It was used by prophets and by God Himself. Israel, like us, continually struggled to stay faithful to God. They would break their covenant with God over and over again as they became restless and searched for something to temporarily satisfy. They were prone to wander. But God remained faithful through it all. He never gave up on his beloved and God never will. That is the overall message of Scripture. God's unrelenting, unabashed, unending love and pursuit of us – his prone-to-wander children.

Lord's Supper

(Move to floor after I finish preaching.)

We come to the Lord's Table to remember – to remember Christ's death for us, the offering up of his life as an ultimate sacrifice to bring God's wandering creation into right relationship with their Creator.

All believers present this morning are invited to take the bread and the cup as the table calls us out of a solitary preoccupation into the fellowship of believers and the fellowship of Jesus Christ.

(Pray before the bread is passed.)

Bread is passed. When all have the bread, hold it and say, “On the night he was betrayed, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body that is broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me.”

Pray and then pass the cup.

When all have the cup, hold it and say, “In the same way, he took the cup also, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.”

Invitation Time:

One of my favorites hymns is “Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing” for several reasons. But the most powerful verse to me of any hymn is from that hymn. Let me share it with you:

*O to grace how great a debtor
Daily I'm constrained to be
Let Thy grace, Lord, like a fetter
Bind my wandering heart to Thee.
Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it.
Prone to leave the God I love.
Here's my heart, Lord, take and seal it,
Seal it for Thy courts above.*

Let's confess this morning – we are prone to wander, prone to leave the God we love.
This morning – come back. Give your heart to God – for the first time or fifteenth time.
God isn't counting. He just wants you back home.

The invitation time is an invitation to all – everyone here – to respond. Today, I've asked Rod to sing "Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing" while we remain in our seats in a time of prayerful response. God is ready to take us back, to forgive us, to restore us. If you want to come forward to pray with one of our pastoral team or to pray at the altar, come as Rod sings. If you want to make this church your church home, then come.

Allow God to ease your wandering spirit this morning and bring your home through his grace and love.