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**A Magnificent Obsession
Hosea 11:1-11**

I have an obsession. During the Monsoon season, I am obsessed with watching the weather radar to see where it is raining. I have the weather app on my church computer, my home computer and my phone. When I see storm clouds in the sky, I look at my phone or my computer to see where the storms are.

I had some friends from New Jersey that came to visit a couple weeks ago. I brought them to the Desert Museum, and while we were there, a huge storm was approaching. As we walked the hiking paths, the Desert Museum employees directed us to seek shelter immediately. We made it to the gift shop just in time.

As we entered the gift shop, I whipped out my phone, hit the weather app and looked at all the bright colors from the radar. And then, I noticed what was happening in Green Valley. It was getting inundated!

"Wow, look at this" I said to my visitors, "Green Valley's getting creamed!"

Another person in the gift shop heard me and came over. He was looking at the weather radar on his phone, too! Turns out he was an airplane pilot – and from Green Valley!. So this airplane pilot and I shared weather radars together, and my friends kind of rolled their eyes and said, "You sure are obsessed with that weather radar."

I am not sure how it all started. I think rain is so rare in the desert that I get giddy when it rains, and I want to know where it is raining. Or, maybe because I want to go somewhere and I need to know if I will face any flooding. Thus, my obsession.

What is your obsession?

The experts say when obsession becomes really bad, it can turn into an obsessive-compulsive disorder. Someone caught in the grip of an obsessive-compulsive disorder gets fixated on one idea, one notion, one motion, and is unable to banish it from his or her mind. CAT scans reveal that one area of the brain seems to get stuck in the "on" position -- refiring the same synapse over and over again.

Well, I am here to tell you today that God has an obsession, and it leans toward an obsessive-compulsive disorder. God is fixated on one idea, one notion that God is

unable to banish from His mind. This obsession is talked about in our scripture passage today. So, I invite you to turn with me to Hosea 11.

(Some of you may have noticed, I preach a lot from the Old Testament. I have an obsession with the Old Testament.)

Before we read, let us pray: Gracious God, your Word is living and full of surprises. Surprise us this day with your obsession and may it fill our hearts with joy. Amen.

In this passage, we go deep into the heart and mind and emotions of God more than anywhere else in the OT. God is reflecting on His relationship with Israel, and Israel has two names here: Israel and Ephraim.

Read Hosea 11:1-11.

I'm going to tell you right away what God's obsession is: it's us. Some people call this chapter the "John 3:16 of the OT." John 3:16 says "For God so loved the world that he gave his only son...." Here God so loves His creation and creatures that God cannot let us go even when we turn away.

This obsessive love of God is described here like that of a mother to a child or a parent to a child. I am going to re-read verses 3-4, but change the word Israel to "you," so it includes all of us:

God says, "I was the one who taught you how to walk, by taking you by your arms." You taught your children or grandchildren how to walk this way, didn't you? God is saying I did that with you.

God continues: "I led you with cords of human kindness." You didn't even know it.

This next phrase: "I lifted the yoke from their neck" is a difficult translation from the Hebrew ("yoke" should really be translated "child"). Most say the best translation is this: "I was to you like those who lift infants to their cheeks." Didn't you do that with your children and grandchildren? God said, I did that with you.

God says, "I was the one who bent down to feed you. "

Can you see God's emotion here toward His children? It's an amazing portrait of God as parent. This portrait of God is not new to the Bible, but it is unique among world religions. No other deity from other religions relates to human beings in quite the same manner or with quite the same passion, with the same loyalty or even the same jealousy.

God goes on and describes a bad day with his children. Any parent knows that there are "those days" when children are anything but lovable. Somehow the parent manages to go through the day and heaves an enormous sigh of relief as the last one is tucked

into bed. Yet looking down at the quiet, sleeping children -- the same kids that were yelled at, grounded, argued with, and swore would be disowned -- the parent's hearts are suddenly stirred by the power of obsessive, parental love. And heaven forbid if hardship or pain is visited on our dear little monsters.

God's passion is no less intense towards us, Hosea reveals. God has an obsessive parental love toward his children.

And the thing is, we are like children; we keep disobeying the divine directives. We keep dismissing the divine presence. It's noted in our passage. Verse 2 "But the more I called Israel, the further they went from me," God says. Verse 7 "My people are determined to turn from me."

We can see God's emotional indecisiveness: Shouldn't I return them to Egypt?, God says, because they refuse to repent? There is a part of God that wants to punish them, to turn them over to the destructive powers of the world, yet God steadfastly refuses to write them off. The reason God's refuses has nothing to do with the people's change of heart and mind. In fact, for the most part, they don't. The reason God refuses to write them off has to do with the heart and mind of God. God's steadfast, obsessive love for us outlasts all of our betrayal.

God is obsessed with reaching the hearts and souls of men and women. God is obsessed with finding a way to restore a right relationship between Creator and creature. God is obsessed with a ridiculous love for men and women despite our endless troublemaking.

Ever since God took that first risky step and created Adam and Eve, God has remained faithful to His creation – no matter how faithless we have been. God is so "obsessed," so compulsive about His creation that God simply will not leave us to our own devices. God has stuck with us from the beginning, and God is constantly muddling about in human affairs. And here it is:

God was so obsessed with establishing first contact with us that God made the covenant with Abraham.

God was so obsessed with finding us a home that God led Moses and the Israelites out of Egypt.

God was so obsessed with teaching us that God revealed the Commandments and the Law.

God was so obsessed with guiding us that God called judges, prophets and kings to speak the divine word and call us back.

God was so obsessed with us that when we ruined all the divine plans, God made new ones.

God was so obsessed with us that God devised a plan of restoration.

God was so obsessed with us that God "gave his only begotten Son that we should not perish but have everlasting life."

We may be creatures, but we are creatures that have a hold on God's heart – it's unreasonable and obsessive. "When you were a child, I loved you. How can I give you up?" (verses 1, 8).

What is our response to this magnificent obsession of God?

We have many obsessions. (You heard of two of mine today.) We obsess about our work. We obsess about our weight. We obsess about our health. We obsess about food. We obsess about our "things." We obsess about our bank account. We obsess about church. Yet, we already have our most-prized possession. Our biggest problem has already been solved. Our deepest longings have already been met in fellowship with God.

One woman gave her response to God's obsession:

"Anyone who provides my oxygen, breath, bone and muscle tissue, brain cells, red and white corpuscles, all the neurons, ions, protons that make me tick on a daily basis; who monitors my every emotion, thought process, blood pressure, heart and neurological makeup; who from my birth has known the running count of hair strands on my head (I can't even keep up with how many fall out in daily brushings!); and to top it off, who thinks nothing but lovely thoughts about me all day -- definitely deserves the trouble of my bending over backward to do whatever it is this kind of God asks, no matter how long it takes, especially since it is only my best interest God has at heart." (Lynn Seward, a writer in Newark, NJ)

So, don't let God slip through the cracks. This is the one in whom we "live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28)..

There really is only one thing worthy of our obsession. One thing only: God.

The Magnificent Obsession.