

## RETURN TO GOD

**Hosea 14: 2-9**

Wednesday, March 7, 2018, 19th Day of Lent

On Ash Wednesday we were called "to observe a holy Lent: by self-examination and repentance."

During a time of crisis the people of Hosea's day were called to repentance. There was good news in this call "Return . . . to the Lord your God." They could return to God because they had an existing relationship, damaged as it was, with him.

They were told to ask God, "Forgive all our sins and receive us graciously." The reason given for asking forgiveness is somewhat surprising. They are to ask forgiveness in order to be able to worship God by praise rather than by sacrificing animals.

As part of their request for forgiveness they are to acknowledge that they cannot be helped by a foreign power, their own military strength, or the powerless false gods they have constructed.

God promises that when they repent he will heal them and love them and will no longer be angry with them.

And then he says something surprising. He compares his repentant and forgiven people to plants: to lilies, cedar trees, olive trees, grain, and grapevines. We remember the words of Jesus when he favorably compared the beauty of lilies to that of the expensive clothing worn by the wealthy king Solomon. Hosea reminds us of the sweet smell of cedar wood and the refreshing shade provided by trees in an arid land. And we remember the smell and texture and taste of warm bread dipped in olive oil. Our memories of sensory experiences from plants are a pale imitation of how God responds to our request for forgiveness.

As we disobey God, we push ourselves away from him and lose the experience of the close relationship we once had with him. But we are accepted as we return to him, ask forgiveness, and ask for his help in living in a way.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, thank you for the blessed assurance of Your forgiveness when we are truly repentant of the sin we have committed. We ask for strength to do Your will and love our neighbor as ourselves. Amen.

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