

We have probably all had the experience of being hurt by someone we love. Often it's just by accident...your loved one says something that comes out wrong. Some have had the experience of being hurt intentionally by someone they love. Sometimes it's something said in a heated moment that can't be taken back or a shocking act of betrayal.

Other times it's an ongoing thing. Physical, verbal and emotional abuse happens between couples, in families and even between friends.

Some of us who are parents have dealt with the anguish of a child whose life has gone off the rails.

In all these situations, there's pain from the broken relationship...the betrayal. But sometimes when we are hurt by a loved one, what causes us the most pain is how much the person we love is hurting themselves.

That's what God is dealing with in this passage from the prophet Hosea. God compares the people of Israel to a beloved child. Some of the images in this passage are that of a parent loving a child. In fact some of the images are pretty maternal.

This loving parent's heart has broken over the disloyalty of the child. The thing is, that disloyalty has resulted in self-destruction.

When powerful nations surrounding Israel were threatening to attack, Israel signed a treaty with Egypt. They expected that Egypt would protect them. But in return, they owed all their love and loyalty to Egypt and Egypt's gods. They turned their back on Yahweh, the God of Israel.

The sad thing is that Egypt could not protect them. Israel was defeated by Assyria and were essentially destroyed as a sovereign people. The Assyrians approach to people they had conquered was to scatter them throughout the region. Unable to unite, the conquered people could not rise up again.

Many of the people of Israel were scattered around the region and other conquered people were moved in. The result in what was once Israel was a mixed race of people who would ultimately become the despised Samaritans.

Even worse, it seems that God has played a role in Israel's destruction. That's difficult for us.

In the culture of the time, disloyal sons were to be severely punished...stoned to death in fact if you go by the laws in Deuteronomy. Destroyed. That's the agony God is dealing with here.

But then, God moves away from that stance...God's heart recoils from the violence. In place of fierce anger, warm and tender compassion arise. God will not come in wrath again.

But what then is there to be done about the disobedience, betrayal and downright evil that we who are God's beloved all too often display? Will God just let it all go? Give evil a pass?

When we declare our ultimate allegiance to something or someone other than God, what is God to do?

When we are cruel to one another, does God just look away?

Well, it took a little over 700 years for God to answer that question. But the answer is astounding. Instead of coming in wrath with divine punishment in mind, God comes as Jesus.

And instead of God destroying disobedient humanity, that disobedient humanity tried to destroy God, in the person of Jesus.

And Jesus let them.

Instead of coming in wrath, God came in love and humility. Instead of coming to inflict punishment, God came to bring forgiveness and new life.

Joined to Christ's death and resurrection, we do experience judgment for the wrongs we do. But that judgment comes with forgiveness and a fresh start, time and time again.

In the unfolding resurrection life hearts and minds are transformed.

Our disloyalty, our cruelty, our arrogance, our self-hatred, all those things still break God's heart, just as surely as Israel did.

But God stays with us...in the risen Christ, God keeps coming to us over and over and over to draw us back...to draw us back to that divine love that refuses to let us go.