

Prayer of the Day:

Lord God, you call us to work in your kingdom and leave no one standing idle. Help us to order our lives by your wisdom and to serve you in willing obedience; through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Verse of the Day:

Alleluia. My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. Alleluia. (2 Cor. 12:9a)

Sermon Text:

Text: Isaiah 55:6-9

⁶ Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near. ⁷ Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon. ⁸ “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the LORD. ⁹ “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

Ever since the very beginning our God has called out to His people. Adam and Eve, covered with crudely fashioned leaves, hid in the garden after they had doomed the world to decay and death and God called out to them. David and Nathan with the little parable of the sheep. Elijah pouting in the cave because things didn't go his way. Peter, Thomas, Paul, it seems almost as if the one common denominator in the lives of God's people impressive, or otherwise, is that they require the voice of God to move them away from sin and into service. In our Old Testament lesson today, Israel has been and continues to struggle in their sin and God, this time through the voice of His servant Isaiah issues for His loving call. And today as the Lord calls out to them, **THE LORD CALLS OUT TO ALL ... TO US!**

From time to time, I have said it is good for us to read a lesson backwards. This is one of those cases. You see it's easy for us to read this section and walk away thinking that God has told us once more that He is smarter than we are so we shouldn't question Him. Don't misunderstand me here, God is certainly omniscient, and His wisdom should always shut the mouths of those who would pretend to know better than He does. Consider the stern words God speaks to Job towards the end of the book for a clear example of God displaying His mental prowess and physical power. But while this section may well call such truth into our minds, God is actually pointing at something far more grand even than His omniscience.

In context, God seems to be pointing to another aspect of His wisdom which exceeds our own and in fact runs counter to the ways of the world around us. Israel regularly fell prey to the thought of work righteousness. The idea that they made their way, not only in the world around them but with their God as well. It led them to some pretty improper attitudes. Many of which God asked Isaiah to speak against. Whether it was emptying worship of hearts and minds and turning it into hollow actions which were supposed to appease God and force Him to do their will or completely despising God and His power to keep His nation safe turning instead to alliances with foreign nations and political powers. Israel even completely gave up on God and turned to the false Gods and the grotesque worship practices of the world around them, of course complaining when things came crashing down because God should have played their game instead of the other way around.

I really wish I could point at Israel here and not be left feeling like I was a complete hypocrite as I did it. I'm willing to guess you know the feeling. While I may not be chasing after Baals and Asherah's, there are plenty of false gods I've put ever so much more trust in than the true One. Sometimes I even catch myself wondering if that's what pandemic and unrest are supposed to impress on me. I put my trust in an awful lot of things on this ball of rock that is spinning through space. Money, power, people, politics, health, family, career, wisdom, strength, the list could go on and on, but I so often forget about the

one who gives it all, who even put the ball of rock on which it all resides here spinning through space in the first place.

Then God says, ⁸ *“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,”* ... ⁹ *“As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”* If “God’s smarter and stronger than you” is the only message we take from these words, well, it all sounds pretty scary.

There is another game I play with Scripture. Professor Deutschlander taught us to play it in German class as we were translating portions of Luther’s Bible. I’ve used it with you before. He called it “What would you do if you were God?” Either with Israel or more pointedly with all of us as we trust well just about anything other than the creator of all to pull us through the day, the week, or the next trial that comes our way? I don’t like the answer, but I know it to be true. I’d find the start over button. I’d wipe out the ingrates and recreate a people who wouldn’t mess everything up like we did, a people who would honor and worship God as He deserves.

Ah, but now dear friends move back to those words. Especially note how they begin with the little word “for”. Don’t toss that out because it is key to understanding this section. You see God’s ways are not our ways, neither are God’s thoughts our own and that little word “for” says that it is precisely **BECAUSE HIS WAYS ARE FAR ABOVE OUR OWN, THAT HE REACHES OUT IN GRACE AND MERCY.**

⁶ *Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near.* ⁷ *Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon.* ⁸ *“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the LORD.* ⁹ *“As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”*

You see this then is the grace and mercy of our God. Grace is the underserved love of God which reaches out to sinners who often would treat Him like a last resort or derelict old relic from a bygone age and mercy is that unfathomable decision which He makes for us that refuses to throw the book at a bunch of ingrates but instead promises His forgiveness to them. No, it doesn’t make a ton of sense to us as we contemplate it. In fact, it is completely foreign to a people who have been taught to make their own way by the sweat of their brow and strength of their backs but God’s ways are better than our own.

I like the way Pastor Jonathan Schroeder put it in our worship planning materials as he summarizes this lesson. “How gracious is God? His call to repentance doesn’t extend to only backsliding Christians. His call to return to Him isn’t restricted to upright citizens. His invitation to call on Him is not reserved for sensible, suburban folk with 2.1 children and a white picket fence. The LORD calls the רָשָׁע, the ungodly and wicked men who worship lust and self. The LORD calls the אִישׁ אָזָן, the hardened sinner whose conscience has long stopped balking at His deeds. Look at what He promises to these people when they repent: mercy and pardon—the care of God and the forgiveness of God. They won’t get what they deserve—that is mercy. They get what they don’t deserve—that is the free pardon of grace. God’s plan to save sinners by grace soars above all that we could conceive or imagine. (Planning Christian Worship Supplement: Year A – Pentecost 18 – First Lesson)”

So dear friends God calls out once again, not in anger or in wrath but in love. He calls to all people, even to us, to you. In light of His free and full forgiveness he urges us to repent and turn from our self-conceived ways which lead us far afield from His Word and His will contained therein. He calls us to repent and return to the cross of our Savior Jesus where we find perfection achieved for us already, pardon paid for in full through His precious blood, hope and a future in a world that often loses both as it chases after whatever bright and shiny thing has promised far less in our world today. **BECAUSE HIS WAYS ARE FAR ABOVE OUR OWN, GOD REACHES OUT IN GRACE AND MERCY.** He reaches out to sinners. Is it not amazing dear friends that **THE LORD CALLS OUT TO ALL ... TO US!** Amen!