

September 21, 2014
Sermon for the Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost
St Peter Lutheran Church
Bowie, TX
Larry Knobloch, Pastor
Isaiah 55:6–9

J.J.- Jesu Juva—Help me, Jesus

Isaiah 55:6–9 (ESV)

⁶ “Seek the Lord while he may be found; call upon him while he is near; ⁷ let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. ⁸ For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. ⁹ For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God, our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!

There's an old story that all of you have probably heard, but it's so appropriate for this message that I must tell it anyway.

A man was walking home one night when he saw a young boy crawling around on his hands and knees at the base of the corner street light. The boy seemed to be looking for something. When the man reached the boy, he asked, "Are you looking for something, son?"

"Yes, Sir," the boy replied. "I dropped a quarter and I'm trying to find it." "I'll help you look," the man offered. After they searched for a little while that man asked:

"Exactly where were you when you dropped your quarter." The boy pointed down the street. "About half way down this block." "If you lost your quarter in the middle of the block, why are you looking for it here on the corner?" the man asked. The boy pointed to the street light and said, "Because the light is better here."

That story popped up in my mind as I read today's Old Testament reading from Isaiah. The little boy looking in the wrong place for his quarter is much like people seeking God in the wrong place, or in the wrong way. Isaiah's words give us some insight on how to seek God.

In verse six, Isaiah tells us to:
"Seek the Lord while he may be found; call upon him while he is near;" (Is 55:6
ESV)

This is more than just a command. This is very good news. God is not distant. We can confidently seek God because He has, through Jesus, made Himself approachable for us. God wants us to draw near to Him.

However, Isaiah also tells us that are supposed to: *“call upon him while he is near;”*.

A person’s soul is eternal, but not so with his earthly life. Each of us has only a limited time on this earth. And we don’t know exactly when that time will run out. I once heard a pastor say that “many would-be eleventh-hour Christians die at ten-thirty”.

Scripture reinforces this point. The author of Hebrews writes: *“man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment”* (Heb 9:27 NIV).

In Eden, God told Adam: *“By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”* (Genesis 3:19 ESV). And the psalmist says: *“What man can live and never see death? Who can deliver his soul from the power of Sheol? Selah”* (Psalm 89:48 ESV)

Jesus made this same point in the parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man. When the rich man was in hell and he asked for help from heaven, he was told: *“... between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.”* (Luke 16:26 (ESV)

Life is too uncertain to think that we can put off seeking God. Scripture gives us all these warnings about seeking God right now, and every moment of

our lives, for one very good reason. There are no second chances beyond the grave. So we must seek God while He is near.

We also should seek God with a repentant heart. While God wants us to be sorry for the sins we commit, God is most interested in repentance. The Greek word we translate as repent is "*metanoe*". That word means to turn around and go the other way. When we see our sin, God wants us to do more than just stop sinning. He wants us to begin to live a better way, to do an about face.

To see how serious God is about repenting, we return to Scripture. The prophet Ezekiel told the Israelites: "*Repent and turn away from your idols, and turn away your faces from all your abominations.*" (Ezek 14:6 ESV).

Later, again through Ezekiel, God tells the Israelites: "*For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Lord God; so turn, and live.*" (Ezek 18:32 ESV).

In the New Testament, Jesus gives this warning to the unrepentant of his day as Luke records Jesus saying: "... *unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.*" (Lk 13:5).

God wants you to seek Him with a heart that is not just sorry, but with a heart that has changed.

We need to leave our thoughts behind and embrace God's commands.

Looking at verse seven of our reading:

"let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. (Is 55:7 ESV).

The only way to eternal life with God is forgiveness. Only the spotless believer will enter Paradise. That sets the bar pretty high. To gain access to heaven you must be forgiven of every sin you have ever committed.

How is that going to happen? Can you do enough good works to make up for all your sins? According to the apostle Paul, good works are not the way to heaven. He told the Ephesians church: *“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”* (Eph 2:8-9 ESV).

The human response to sin is to earn your way to heaven. But we are so sinful we can't pay for our sins. Because of our pitiful condition, and out of his great love, God made a way for us to be restored to Him.

Jesus explained that way to Nicodemus as He said:

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.¹⁸ Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.” John 3:16–18 (ESV)

God doesn't grant us forgiveness because we deserve it or because we have earned it. God forgives us because He sent His Son, Jesus Christ to die for our sins. He made a way for our forgiveness. God forgives us because He loves us and His love is greater than our sin.

That can be hard for some people to accept. We are flawed. We don't think like God thinks. We believe that forgiveness comes after revenge has been achieved. Or maybe we feel some things can never be forgiven.

God doesn't ask us to understand the way He thinks. He just wants us to accept the way He does things as the right way to do things. If you think someone has done something too horrible to be forgiven, you're wrong. If you think you've done something unforgivable, you're wrong.

Since our natural, sinful way of thinking is so foreign to God's pure way of thinking, even just accepting God's way is impossible for us. We need help and God provides that help. Through His Word and by the power of His Holy Spirit, God brings the power to change our way of thinking. Here is how that holy Word describes God's gift to us.

When many of his disciples found Jesus' teaching hard to accept, Jesus told them: *"It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life."* John 6:63 (ESV)

Paul assured the Roman churches that God would give them the faith they needed through His powerful word. He writes: *"So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ."* (Ro 10:17 ESV).

What wonderfully good news we have in today's text. God promises to give us the faith it takes to seek Him while we can, to come before Him with a repentant heart, and to embrace His thoughts as superior to our thoughts. And God does all this so we might have forgiveness and everlasting life with Him.

Rejoice in your forgiveness and give all glory, honor and praise to God,
our heavenly Father and to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!

Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding keep our hearts and
minds through Christ Jesus.

Amen.

S. D. G - Soli Deo Gloria
To God alone be glory

“Seeking God”
Isaiah 55:6–9

1. Are you seeking God?
2. Where are you looking?
3. Trust God and not your own understanding.