

Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost/September 20, 2020  
Isaiah 55:6-9/Calling on the Lord  
Holy Spirit Lutheran Church  
Pastor Jerry Stobaugh

“...call upon him while he is near...”

Have you ever lost something and then had to go looking for it? I'm pretty sure that has happened to all of us. Then after you find what was misplaced, how often do you tell others you found it in the last place you looked; now there's some insight! Once we find what we were looking for, the place where we found it is, in fact, the last place where we looked. Nobody looks for something, finds it, and then keeps on looking for it. That would be foolish.

We seek many things, things we've lost, communication with loved ones, great deals on the things to buy. Some people seek fame and fortune, others romance. We all, to varying degrees, seek happiness, depending on how we each define the word and when the going gets tough, relief. We have more seeking to do, that is to seek the Lord. The Lord wants us to seek Him. He sent the Holy Spirit to inspire the prophet Isaiah to speak and write these words of comfort to His people. Jerusalem had fallen in the sixth century BC, and the people of God were seeking comfort and hope. God sent one of His pastors, the prophet Isaiah, to bring them words of comfort, words of Gospel, so they would not lose heart. These words are recorded in Scripture and read today so you would not lose heart, and let your hearts be troubled. The Lord extends to us not a command but a gentle invitation: “Seek the LORD while He may be found; call upon Him while He is near.” It is very good to have the Lord near us, for where He is, there are His gifts, the gifts He desires to shower upon us.

Christ gives His gifts freely, but He doesn't give them willy-nilly. To do so would be casting pearls before swine. What the Lord seeks of

His people is repentance. He says through Isaiah: “let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts.” God is seeking sinners, so they would repent because God wants to forgive sinners, like you and me. He wants us to seek Him and His forgiveness, to call upon Him in prayer, praise, and thanksgiving while He is still near to us. If God departs from us, we are in seriously deep spiritual trouble. What does this mean? It means, if we do not seek Him where He is found, we are in danger of spending eternity in hell.

We risk eternal condemnation when we do not seek Him where He is found. Where God is found is where He willingly binds Himself for our sake. The God who is without limits freely and willingly binds Himself to His Word and Sacraments. It is there God gives His gifts of forgiveness of sins, eternal life, and salvation. It is only there and nowhere else the Lord is giving His gifts. This is a sure, certain, and iron-clad guarantee, for God promised this to us in His Word. When it comes to our souls, we need certainly. When we look elsewhere for Him, somewhere He has NOT promised to be found, we have doubt, and doubt is never a good thing where our salvation is concerned. When we look somewhere else for God instead of where He promises to be, we are telling God we don't think His gifts are good enough for us, we want Him to deal with us on OUR terms, NOT His. We've heard the excuses; we may have given these excuses ourselves. We may think, we can worship God when we're on the lake or out camping. If this is true, then how do you hear your sins are forgiven? Remember St. Paul tells us faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of Christ. We see the beauty of God's creation, but we don't hear the forgiveness of our sins.

If we are looking for ways to seek God, look to the Psalms, the prayer book of the Church. The Psalmist did not come up with these words on his own; He wrote as inspired by the Holy Spirit, just as all of

Holy Scripture, including the parts we quote in the Liturgy, are inspired by God the Holy Spirit. We are heirs of this God-pleasing tradition, for in it we receive by hearing and by taste the forgiveness of our sins. King David writes: [Ps 34:8] “Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him!” We take refuge in our Lord at His gracious invitation, for we are burdened by our sins, and we get to come to Him for rest. It is here in our Lord’s house He invites us to unload our burdens, burdens Jesus already took upon Himself all the way to the cross. It’s hard for us to understand because God’s thoughts are higher than our thoughts, but yet it is all so simple for us to appreciate: God sent His Son Jesus to die for us because He loves us, for God is love. It’s so simple we recite that love God has for us in John 3:16: “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.”

“Whoever believes in Him....” Whoever seeks the Lord while He may be found; the Lord is saying the same thing through Isaiah and St. John. He is inviting all people to believe in Him. He helps us seek Him. He sends us His Holy Spirit, who calls us by the Gospel, enlightens us with His gifts, sanctifies and keeps us in the one true faith. We seek the Lord, and the Holy Spirit leads us to Him. He leads us to where the Lord is to be found, in His Word, just as you have heard it pronounced to you in Holy Absolution, just as you have heard it read from the lectern, just as you have heard it proclaimed to you, the Good News that God forgives your sins for the sake of His Son, Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit leads you to where the Lord is to be found; He led you to Holy Baptism, where God called you His child. The Holy Spirit leads you to where the Lord is to be found, in the body and blood of Jesus Christ, given in, with, and under bread and wine, given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. The Holy Spirit also leads us to call upon the Lord while He is near. Our Lord has made that easy for us, because He is right here! He is right

here, in His house, where He gives His gifts through His Word and Sacraments! We don't seek Jesus at the cross. He isn't there. We don't seek Him at the tomb. He isn't there, either. Why not? Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! The gifts Christ won for us on the cross, where He bled and died for you and for me, He gives to us here in His house, around font, lectern, and altar, where He has promised to be found.

Listen to these words from Martin Luther in a sermon he preached in 1538: "When you are baptized, partake of Holy Communion, receive the absolution, or listen to a sermon, heaven is open, and we hear the voice of the Heavenly Father; all these works descend upon us from the open heaven above us. God converses with us, provides for us; and Christ hovers over us—but invisibly. And even though there were clouds above us as impervious as iron or steel, obstructing our view of heaven, this would not matter. Still we hear God speaking to us from heaven; we call and cry to Him, and He answers us. Heaven is open, as St. Stephen saw it open [Acts 7:55]; and we hear God when He addresses us in Baptism, in Holy Communion, in confession, and in His Word as it proceeds from the mouth of the men who proclaim His message to the people." Remember, God has called you and at the right time, He will take you to be with Him in the new heavens and the new earth forever.