

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Fifteenth Sunday After Trinity, September 24, 2017

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 16, 237:1, 375, 297, 52.

Lessons: Isaiah 43:1-8, 1 John 5:11-15, Matthew 7:7-12.

Sermon Text: Isaiah 55:6-11.

Sermon by Pastor M. H. Eibs

In Christ, our sure and only Salvation, dear friends:

The words of our text are God's call to repentance addressed to Israel about 700 years before Christ was born. In the approximately 2700 years since that time, the Lord has sent his promised salvation in Christ his son, and he has made provision for the gracious message of salvation to be proclaimed in all the world. Many have heard and come to faith in Jesus, while many more have rejected the message of salvation.

At this late date in the world's history, it is not foolish to ask: To which group do we belong? Are we among those who take it for granted that they are Christians because they belong to a church? Or, is it a matter of personal conviction that Jesus is our own Savior in whom we trust for the forgiveness of all our sins?

God still is giving the opportunity to hear the true Word of God in our midst. Let us take advantage of it. Let us learn about:

GOD'S GRACIOUS WAY OF SALVATION.

- 1. It calls for true repentance in the day of grace;**
- 2. It freely promises pardon, contrary to man's thoughts and ways; and,**
- 3. It accomplishes the Lord's purposes through his Word.**

“Seek the Lord while he may be found; call on him while he is near.” This was the Lord's gracious call to repentance to Israel while they had the prophet Isaiah to preach to them. As long as they were still living and could hear Isaiah's message, they had the Lord near, and there was opportunity to be saved. The people of Israel in Isaiah's day were privileged people. Think of what they heard! In addition to the abundant pardon mentioned in our text, they heard that this pardon would come through the virgin's Son: ***“The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.”*** Is. 7:14 They heard from Isaiah these words: ***“To us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”*** Is. 9:6 They heard the Gospel of the vicarious atonement: ***“He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; ... the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.”*** Is. 53:5.6 They heard the precious assurance: ***“Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are mine.”*** Is. 43:1

You and I have had the opportunity to hear this same good news of salvation in Christ. To us also the call of the Lord is addressed: ***“Seek the Lord while he may be found; call on him while he is near.”*** God is giving us a time of grace right now. By time of grace we mean this: We are still alive and have the opportunity to hear. And God is graciously giving us the opportunity to hear the true Gospel of Christ. How long we will live, we don't know. How long the truth of the Gospel will be preserved to us, we don't know. Therefore, we make the urgent plea to repent in the day of grace while there is opportunity.

The Lord calls for true repentance. Our text says: ***“Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts.”*** The Apostle Paul told the people in his day that the Lord ***“commands all people everywhere to repent.”*** Acts 17:30 Repentance is more than mere good intentions. John the Baptist told the people who came to watch his baptizing, but who thought they didn't need remission of sins themselves: ***“Produce fruit in***

keeping with repentance.” Matt. 3:8 God does not pardon sinners who continue in their wickedness. The Gospel contains not a single promise of forgiveness to the person who goes on in his iniquity. To those who obstinately persist in their evil ways the promise of pardon cannot be given. To do so would only confirm the person in his sin and give him the false assurance that all is well.

The Lord calls for the sinner to be converted. Our text says: **“Let him turn to the Lord, and he will have mercy on him.”** To be converted means to be turned completely around from the way of sin to the Lord. **“For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Sovereign Lord. Repent, and live!”** Ezek. 18:32 Paul said he was sent by the Lord for the heathen: **“to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins.”** Acts 26:18

God's way of salvation is this: The Holy Spirit through the Word, by the grace of God in Christ, freely promises pardon, contrary to man's thoughts and ways.

2.

Isaiah says: **“Let him turn to the Lord, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon, ‘For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,’ declares the Lord. ‘As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.’”** The precious promise of God's mercy and pardon is something that man in his thoughts would never imagine. Human reason would never conceive the idea that a sinner could be declared righteous without any merit or worthiness in him. Man's thoughts and ways, as seen in all the religions of the world outside of Christianity, only have to do with man's works, man's goodness and man's merits. Be good and do good, and then you'll go to heaven! Work-righteousness!

But, just as the heavens are so far above the earth, so much higher are God's thoughts and ways. Listen to these amazing facts of the Gospel of Christ: **“You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. ... While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. ... When we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son.”** Rom. 5:6.8.10 Paul told the Corinthians: **“All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them.”** 2 Cor. 5:18-19 This is a fact that applies to all sinners everywhere. Christ took the place of sinners. Paul says: **“God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”** 2 Cor. 5:21 What a precious and an amazing truth! God declares sinners righteous! Salvation does not depend on our good works, our fine deeds, and our attempts to keep God's commandments. Jesus did everything for us. He kept every commandment, and he suffered and died to pay for all the commandments we have broken. It's an accomplished fact. **“He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.”** Rom. 4:25 It's free and undeserved love in Christ: **“It is by grace you have been saved.”** Eph. 2:5 It's complete and abundant pardon: **“The blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from every sin.”** I John 1:7

This Gospel truth is accepted by faith in Jesus. By faith we accept the objective fact that we stand justified in the sight of God, not because of our works, but because of Christ's works. Paul says: **“We ... know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified.”** Gal. 2:15-16

How, then, may a person come to faith in Christ? It all happens by the power of the Holy Spirit through the Word. In God's gracious way of salvation his purposes are accomplished through his Word.

3

In order to show the power of the Gospel Word, the Lord makes a comparison in our text: **“As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.”** What a fine comparison this is, especially for us to think about in the spring. In the spring when the crops and gardens are planted, and the flowers begin to bloom, we learn anew the precious work of God in giving snow and rain and causing the seed to grow. The wonderful result is that seed is provided for the next

year's sowing and food for mankind to eat. Now, just as this is accomplished by God's grace and power, so also his holy Word, when it is proclaimed, creates faith in the hearts of the hearers.

It's all God's gift to us. It is his holy Gospel Word and he gave it the power to achieve his purpose, that men might believe the good news of salvation in Christ, and be saved. We will not here dwell on the sad fact that many hearers reject salvation in Christ in unbelief, and through no fault of God or his Word are eternally lost. Foolish unbelievers themselves are to blame for their damnation in hell.

This precious truth our text brings out is that the Gospel Word is powerful and it saves. The Word itself is powerful. The Bible repeats this truth in several places. Paul wrote: ***"I am not ashamed of the Gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes."*** Rom. 1:16 Again Paul writes: ***"Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ."*** Rom. 10:17 We read in James' Epistle what we should do: ***"Humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you."*** James 1:21 And Peter taught: ***"You have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God."*** I Pet. 1:23 The Gospel of Christ is God's Word. The omnipotent God himself is active in and through it, and thus his purposes are accomplished.

Let us, then, hear a precious truth of the Gospel written by Isaiah: ***"Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool."*** Is. 1:18 Even as we hear this, the Holy Spirit is working in our hearts through this powerful Word.

“May we in faith its tidings learn
Nor thanklessly its blessings spurn;
May we in faith its truth confess
And praise the Lord our Righteousness.” Amen.
(The Lutheran Hymnal 297:6)

Reprinted from Ministry By Mail for May 4, 1986.