



Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

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September 14, 2008
18th Sunday after Pentecost
Isaiah 55:6-9
Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: Isaiah 55:6-9
Psalm of the Day: Psalm 27
Second Lesson: Philippians 1:8b-27
Gospel: Matthew 20:1-16

Turn to the Lord

By turning away from sin
By turning to God in humility

Did you ever notice there are certain stores, usually furniture stores, that seem to have a perpetual “going out of business sale” that just goes on and on and on? You drive by it and they are going out of business. You drive by it a month later and they are still going out of business. You drive by another month later and they are still going out of business. I think that “going out of business” big yellow sign out front is to try to give you the impression there is something urgent and something limited and you need to get in there soon and buy something. It sure seems like those sales aren’t that limited because they go on and on forever and then they move to the other furniture store on the other side of town.

There are a lot of things in life that are put forward to us as a “limited time offer” that really aren’t. There are a lot of people, especially when it comes to sales, who want our money. But what I just read to you from the Holy Spirit, working through the pen of Isaiah, tells us of a truly limited time offer, right? *Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near.* There is a time when a person can no longer find God and His grace and His forgiveness and His love. That’s why we call our time that we have on this earth our “time of grace.” It is our time to come to know His grace because it is appointed for a man who wants to die and then face judgment, but if we don’t know God when we die, there are no second chances, there is no “phone a friend,” there are none of these other things that you might get on a game show. This isn’t a game show. This is God’s love for us in Christ, and it’s the most important thing you and I have.

That’s why our God reminds us of the urgency and the importance of turning to the Lord. Each day when we get up we can remind ourselves, “Today, turn to the Lord. Turn away from my sin. Turn to the Lord.” But also, we are reminded that part of turning to the Lord is turning to the Lord in humility. What I mean by that is, understanding who He is, what He is, and who and what we are. That ought to keep us humble.

Seek the LORD while he may be found. Our God doesn’t want anyone to perish. He said that quite clearly in Scripture over and over. He doesn’t want anyone to have to get paid the wages of sin. He tells us the wages of sin is death, eternal death in hell. But even before the world was created, God had in mind His plan on how He would see to it that wouldn’t be a wage or a check you and I would have to cash. Before the

creation of the world, He planned to send himself into this world, to live in our place and die in our place. He planned to send himself in a humble way, but in a way that met all of God's righteousness, because God demands of you and me that we be perfect, that we be absolutely holy, that we be absolutely without sin. Well, if you're breathing, you've probably sinned today, right?

We sin, in our thoughts and our words and our actions. And we sin in specific ways that this is going to talk about in the last part of our text. But God, knowing us and knowing what sinners we are, sent Jesus to be perfect in our place and then take all of our sins, carry them to the cross, and then die for them all. He pointed people ahead to that Messiah that would come before. He came. And now that we live after He came, He points us back to that Messiah. It all focuses on Jesus and who He is and what He has done for us. It's on that basis that God can say to these people who lived 700 years before Jesus did, "Turn to the Lord, because God will have mercy on you." Our God will freely pardon you because he has promised the One who would crush the devil's head. He has promised the One who Jeremiah said would be our righteousness, our perfection.

Our God's grace and mercy is what takes away our sins, not our efforts, not our struggles, not our decision to turn to the Lord because we can't even do that on our own. By our own nature, we are spiritually blind, spiritually dead, enemies of God. We are dead spiritually, and dead means powerless. Dead means there is nothing.

The kids and I bought Paula some nice Mother's Day plants earlier this year, around Mother's Day, right? Beautiful plants—you can go take some cuttings off of them right now if you want. They are on the sidewalk out in front of our house. There are three of them on a little metal thing. The only problem is that right now, if you were to take a cutting, someone forgot to water them during the year and they are dead as a doornail. So you can go take all the cuttings you want and they aren't going to grow, right? They are dead.

That's you and me. So when God says, "Turn to the Lord," He is not telling us to do it on our own. He turns us. But when He turns us to His grace and His love through the work of the Holy Spirit, He reminds us it also involves turning away from something, not just turning toward Him. He says, "*Let the wicked forsake his way.*" And the "wicked" is you and me, everyone that is born. That isn't just someone that is worse than you are. It's you. It's me.

"*Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts.*" At times you and I will hide behind, "Yeah, I might have had a nasty thought about that person and thought they were a real so-and-so, but I didn't act on it, so I am doing pretty good." God tells us to turn away from all of our sins. Turn to God for forgiveness for all of them. Don't make excuses for them. Don't say, "I'm not as bad as someone else," or "It's only my thoughts." He tells us just how much of us He wants to turn toward Him—our actions, our thoughts, our words, everything. And the truth of the matter is that if we look at our lives, even we who believe that Jesus took away our sins, we don't always turn away from all of our sins. That's why God gives us our fellow believers—so when we are starting to drift, when we are caught up in ourselves, when we get a little arrogant in

thinking that we know it all, we have fellow believers who say to us, “What you did is wrong. What you said is wrong. What you are doing is wrong. Turn back to the Lord.” That turning, it’s the basis of the word “repent.” Turn away from your sin and turn to God.

You and I need that reminder at times because as sinners, one of our sins is pride and arrogance and thinking that we know all there is to know. That’s why our God also tells us to turn away from our sins, find forgiveness in Him, and then thank Him for what He has done for us in freely parting us. We do this by continuing to turn away from that sin and living for God and glorifying God and serving God. But He tells us to do it in humility. He reminds us not to think we are going to come up with a better way of doing things.

The better way of doing things—think about the Gospel that we read today. Don’t you think that guy that owned that vineyard was unfair? He gave people that were there only an hour the same as the people that endured the whole heat of the day. Don’t you think that’s unfair? When you hear that read, don’t you think, “That just isn’t right. What those vineyard workers need is a good union so they get things shaped up,” right? Do you really want God to give you what you deserve? Don’t start thinking more of ourselves than we ought to because if God gives us what we deserve, we go to hell.

Think about how that relates to other things in life. There are a lot of things that happen in this life that we just don’t understand. We don’t fully understand His grace because there are times when we will say, “He shouldn’t act that way towards things like that.” We rejoice in his grace. We love His grace when it is applied to us individually, but sometimes we just aren’t so sure when he applies it to you, right? We aren’t so sure that He is even a God of grace or a God of love when certain things happen in our lives, right? We live in a sinful world. A sinful world is going to have problems. It’s going to have heartaches. It’s going to have hardships. And as you and I walk with Christ through this world, we are going to step in some potholes. We are going to have things happen in our lives that hurt. We are going to have things happen in our lives that we don’t understand.

Our God reminds us this morning that our thoughts are not His thoughts and our ways are not His ways. He’s looking at the whole big picture. We are looking at the pothole we are sitting in. We are looking the heartache that we are living through. We are looking at the hurt we are carrying in our hearts every day and we want to say, “Why God? How could you let this happen?” God reminds us that we don’t always understand everything and you know, really, isn’t it the height of arrogance that you and I, as sinners, as created beings, would be able to understand everything that a Holy God does or would allow to happen? Isn’t that really the height of arrogance?

Think of it this way—do any of you have a dog at home? A pet dog, a house pet, a dog running around the house—don’t you love it when you are too tired and don’t feel like doing it when the dog picks up the paper and reads it to you so you don’t have to read it? Don’t you just kind of love when that happens? Or when you don’t feel like making coffee in the morning and you say to the dog, “Go make me a pot of coffee,” and he goes and makes it? Isn’t that nice?

Now you wouldn't really expect that to happen, right? A dog isn't going to read you the paper. A dog isn't going to make you coffee. A dog is a dog. It doesn't understand those things. We might say our dogs are pretty smart, but they aren't doing any of that, right?

In the same way, how would we expect that as sinful human beings we are going to understand everything about God? We can't make coffee for God. We can't read Him the newspaper. As high as the heavens are above the earth, so high are His thoughts and ways above our thoughts and ways.

So, when we don't understand why God allows things to happen that happen, go back to what you do understand about God. He loved you enough to stretch out His arms on the cross. He loved you enough to take all of your sins so that He said, "God, if it's possible, take this away from me" when He was in the garden—like the window above our altar, right? He loved you enough to take all of your sins on His shoulders so that He cried out "My God! My God! Why have you forsaken me?" You and I can understand that. Our God loves us with a love that is so intense that it's amazing and beyond belief. That we can understand.

Now, I might not understand how His body and blood are in, with and under the bread and wine when I come to His altar, but He said it, and His ways and thoughts are higher than my ways and thoughts, so faith says, "I believe it." And that body and blood that was given and shed is given to us in, with and under that bread and wine so that we know for a certainty with taste, with touch, with smell, with sight that our God loves us and has taken away our sins.

I might not understand everything about God, and I never will, and neither will you. But I understand He loves me. I understand I need to turn to Him when I have turned away from Him. And I know for a certainty that I need you to help me turn back to Him when I am caught up in sins or going in the wrong direction. That's why he puts us together—so that we can help each other turn to the Lord.