

Gathered, Gifted and Joyful in God's House

12th Sun. after Pent. – 08/20/23 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Isaiah 56:1, 6-8 Pastor Keith Besel

v. 8, [Literally from the original Hebrew], **“The declaration of the Lord Yahweh; the one who gathers the banished ones of Israel: ‘I will still gather others to it, besides its ones already gathered’.”**

Introduction

✘ Generally people hate to be “excluded”, right? It often doesn’t even matter what the group or activity or characterization may be, if someone finds it to be desirable, or popular, or beneficial in some way, they want to be “included”.

➔ And this instinctive desire within us can be a real motivator. It pushes and pressures us at times to even change who we are and what we do, say and even believe, just so that we can be “a part of the group”. In fact, this happens both in negative and positive ways; negatively when it draws us into actions and behaviors that lead to our physical or emotional or spiritual harm; and positively when it leads us away from those harmful things into groups or beliefs or activities that actually build and strengthen us physically, emotionally and spiritually.

✘ “Inclusiveness” – that’s a pretty intense term in our world today. It sparks arguments, defines political and cultural and religious core values, and frankly it’s very hard in this world to get a clear consensus on how it should actually be defined, because so much of what is labeled as “inclusiveness” today is so narrowly understood that in the end it actually “excludes” people just as much, or more than it “includes” them.

➔ And I am convinced that this is occurring on both and every side of the various spectrums of our society. Whether you are liberal or conservative; progressive or conventional; grumpy or happy; young or old; rich or poor; red, yellow, black, brown or white; whoever you are, you have many times over thought of things or people in ways you believed were “inclusive”, but in reality your own agendas or world-views or presuppositions actually turned it into something that ended up “excluding” people or things along the way.

➔ So in that way, I guess we can all rejoice, because every one of us is “included” with everyone else in the human race as imperfect, flawed, selfish-to-the-core sinners! And the result of that fact is why St. Paul said at the end of our Epistle Reading today, in Romans 11:32, “God has consigned all to disobedience.”

I. God's People - Israel

✘ We don’t deserve, nor is it possible for us to be “included” under the umbrella, or within the label of being “God’s people”. That’s the way it has been all the way back in history from the moment that both Adam and Eve turned away from God’s perfect gift of a perfect existence in the Garden of Eden and chomped into that one forbidden fruit. They wanted to be “included”; they wanted to “be like God” and they resented the fact that He had lovingly placed parameters around that one tree in the Garden because He knew that it would corrupt and infect them with the knowledge of “evil” and sin, where to that point all that they knew about was “good” (Gen. 3).

➔ No that fall into sin was not God’s desire or intention for the human race. He loved His Creation, even after we had poisoned it with sin. And since it was impossible for any of us to fix the problem He had to be the one to bring about the solution. If not, then all of mankind would be “included” together; “included” in hell, which Jesus described in Matthew 8:12, as the place of eternal “weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

✘ So God came to Abraham and He's the one who made a covenant of "inclusiveness"; telling Abraham that he and his descendants, Isaac, and Jacob would be the bloodline that would eventually be known as God's people; the people of Israel. And here's the deal, those people were not to be defined by things like earthly nationality or societal status or political influence, but instead by their faithfulness to God's covenant of love and grace.

→ God's the one that gives His Word of truth; that reveals Himself as Lord and Savior to all sinners; and gathers those sinners into His presence with the blessings of His gifts through the promise that His Son, the Messiah would come not just for Israel but for "all peoples" (v.7) everywhere in every time.

II. What God's people do.

✘ And the great thing about God is that He doesn't keep the parameters of His plan for restoring and redeeming mankind vague or without a very clear definition. In fact we have here in Isaiah 56 today God's complete definition of "inclusivity". He starts, telling us who "God's people" are by describing for us what God's people do. In verse one we have two imperative verbs, meaning He's not giving us optional things to do. Instead these are very direct instructions, "Keep justice, and do righteousness". "Justice" refers to equitable relationships with all people and "righteousness" means that a person does what is "right" according to God, and God alone within those relationships.

→ But remember, these are not things God's people do to become His people, but it's what they do and how they are to live because He has undeservedly made them His people. Also remember, at the time Isaiah wrote this, the Messiah had not yet come. But He had been promised through the bloodline of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. So it's those who believed God's promise of forgiveness and salvation in the coming-Jesus who were "God's people"; the people of "Israel". And that's the reason He says His people are to "keep justice and do righteousness", "for soon My salvation will come" and the Hebrew of the last part of verse one literally says, "and My righteousness [will] be revealed."

→ Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 1:30 that Jesus "became to us" "righteousness from God". He's the one who shows us what is "right" in making the way for all people to be saved and to be included in God's people, Israel.

✘ Then in verse six God further defines those who are "included". 1) they "join themselves to Yahweh", 2) they "minister to" or serve "Him", 3) they actually "love the name of Yahweh", and 4) they "become His servants".

→ These are the ones, God says, "who keep the Sabbath and do not profane it, and hold fast My covenant...".

→ Sadly, so many of those who think they are included in God's people are not, because they have excluded themselves from God's most precious gift of Sabbath. Remember, the word "sabbath" literally means, "rest" and its roots go back to the seventh day of Creation when God Himself "rested", or "sabbathed" from all of His work of creating the universe (Gen. 2:2).

✘ You see, the Sabbath is God's antidote to our world's warped idea of the purpose of life. It's a two-fold problem that we face. Each sinful person thinks his/her life is all about getting, achieving and hoarding, while the rest of the world thinks everyone else's life is about productivity, quotas, producing wealth, busyness and one word, "more".

→ But God graciously comes into this understanding of life with the Third Commandment and says, "Remember the Sabbath Day by keeping it holy". His is a countercultural idea; putting an intentional work stoppage into each week with an equal-opportunity event that overrides all distinctions among the human race. It includes everyone in a necessary break from working to

earn our place into God's presence. Because on the Sabbath it is God who is the one that gathers souls together in a time of spiritual "rest"; a Sabbath of salvation gifts that are not only good for us, but also benefit the world around us.

→ The Sabbath is a moment when we stop our addiction to work and always striving for more, to learn about Yahweh from His living and active and perfect Word. This is why Martin Luther wrote in the Small Catechism about the Sabbath, "We should fear and love God so that we do not despise preaching and His Word, but hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it" (3rd Commandment meaning).

III. God Brings His people to Himself

✘ These are the people, God says in verse seven that "I will bring to My holy mountain, and make them joyful in My house of prayer." We see it here again, God's the one who takes the initiative and does all of the work in His perfect plan of redemption. Those terms, "Holy Mountain" and "House of Prayer" are both the Old Testament parallels for being "included" in God's family of believers.

→ Though He's talking about Mt. Zion where God's Temple was built in Jerusalem, it's not about the physical mountain, or the stone building, but about the one true God, Yahweh, who resides and reigns there in His Temple; and Who, from there dispenses His saving power and grace around the entire world to "all peoples" (v.7).

✘ We see that right here – right now in this 21st century, Ft. Lupton, CO version of God's "house of prayer". For it is right here, dear people of God, that He has taken the initiative again; gathering you here by the power of His Holy Spirit in the one name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit; the name He placed Himself upon you in your baptism. It's here that He is giving you His proclamation of forgiveness, teaching you from His perfect Word, filling you with His love, bringing you His Son's body and blood to strengthen you in your faith, and then providing all of us the avenue to respond in our confessions of sins and faith; in our prayers and praises in a holy conversation between a holy God and His people!

IV. God defines "Inclusiveness"

✘ Yes, God is the one who properly defines this concept of "inclusivity" when He says at the end of verse seven, "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples."

→ So many people say that Biblical Christianity is an "exclusive" religion, but actually the opposite is the truth. For only Yahweh "includes" every single human of all time in His salvation plan.

✘ In verse eight "The Lord Yahweh" is "the one who gathers the banished ones of Israel" and says, "I will still gather others to it, besides the ones already gathered." There is no one left out of that sentence folks. He has brought the people of Israel, who were outcasts, banished to be slaves in Egypt, through the Red Sea and made them His holy people. And because of His love for the entire world, He sent His Son Jesus here in human flesh to sacrifice His sin-less flesh in our place on the cross; to become the one and only way back to the Father for eternity in Paradise.

→ You see Jesus is the great gatherer of all souls. In Matthew 11:28 He bids everyone, "Come to Me, all who labor and are heavy laden (with sin), and I will give you rest." That's the greatest "Sabbath" promise ever right there folks. And He includes everyone in that gracious invitation.

✘ No one is excluded in God's salvation plan. Everyone is included somewhere. The work is already done by Jesus for all! The invitation to receive faith in Jesus and forgiveness from sin and salvation and eternity in heaven is for all!

→ And it's all those who do not turn away from Him in unbelief to follow their own ways of disobedience and selfish desire and worship of the world's ways; it's those who receive His free gifts; we are the ones whom God promises in verse seven to fill with "joy" in His presence right here, right now, and into all of eternity. Dear friends, let's rejoice together in God's "inclusive" gifts today. Amen.