

Close to God in a Higher Way of Life

16th Sun. after Pent. – 09/20/20 – Mt. Calvary Luth.
Text: Isaiah 55:6-9 Pastor Keith Besel

v. 8 **“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, declares the LORD”.**

Introduction

- ⊗ I would say it is safe to assume that on some level all believers would say that their core desire is to be “close to God”, right? I mean, how many of you want to be “close to God”?
 - ➔ And yet Bible passages like Psalm 113:5-6 agree with the passage I just read which asks, “Who is like Yahweh our God, who is seated on high, who looks far down on the heavens and the earth?”
- ⊗ Did you hear that? Not only the earth but even “the heavens” are “far down” and away from our Almighty God.
 - ➔ Mary Beth and I just finished watching a series of shows this week based upon the concept of an international group of astronauts and their journey to be the first humans to land on Mars. It makes one think, not only about how small we are as humans, but even how small this world is upon which we live.
 - ➔ It only takes a matter of minutes in a spacecraft to break through the earth’s atmosphere and enter into space. Once in space, you would be able to look back and see the entire world as a huge globe. And if you went to Mars, after approximately nine months of time, this world on which we live would look like just a small spot in the distance. And eventually if you kept going, after years of flight, you’d pass by Neptune and leave our solar system.
 - ➔ Even that though is not the edge of space; not the point from which our almighty God is looking “far down” upon all that He has created. For God doesn’t look down merely upon earth or even our solar system. No, He looks upon the entire universe, made up of countless solar systems; the distance that makes our solar system just a tiny speck to God.
- ⊗ And yet, the prophet Isaiah says to you and me today in verse six of our Old Testament Reading today, “Seek the LORD while He may be found; call upon Him while He is near”.
 - ➔ How can this be so? How can the One who has created and oversees the unfathomable expanse of the entire universe actually call upon and invite such measly and insignificant creatures as you and me to come “near” to Him and “be found” (v.6)?

I. His thoughts and ways are not like ours.

- ⊗ In fact, it is very easy for us to ask that question when we consider the great difference between the LORD’s thoughts and ways, and our own. Our human, worldly way of thinking and doing things actually divides and drives us farther away from God, doesn’t it?
 - ➔ After all, on the most basic level folks, we are all only “creatures” – those who have been created by God! That means, contrary to popular belief, that we are not independent or self-determining beings. No, as God asks in Isaiah 45:9, “Does the clay say to him who forms it, ‘What are you making?’” No! You and I folks are what God has made us to be.
 - ➔ And yet, more and more we fight against God’s design and intent for us. We are not the ones who define the LORD and His characteristics in spite of all the belief systems and idols that

we put together to try and validate our self-centered urges and desires. It is impossible for us to find the true God or even believe and trust in Him on our own. For example, I have yet to ever have something I've made in my numerous carpentry projects take over the saw or the drill and start to shape me into something that it wants instead.

✘ No, our ways as sin-filled creatures are clearly not the ways of God. God gives us all that we need for this body and the life He has given us; to fulfill the purpose He has in mind for us in His kingdom. And instead, what do we do with it all?

→ We see God's generosity and blessing upon someone else and we become green with envy. We treat each other with harsh words, impatience, and demands that we expect will give us the upper hand.

→ If someone makes a mistake or acts in a way with which we do not agree, do we give them the benefit of the doubt and engage with them in an attempt to understand or work out our differences? No, our typical response is to assume they did what they did to hurt us or to get an advantage over us. Or else we quickly react in anger or judgment – or maybe worst of all, we pull away and implement the “nuclear bomb” of all personal reactions. We apply the silent treatment. We refuse to answer their calls or texts. We refuse to talk with them and instead we talk about them to others so that we can spread the sin and the hurt and the harm even wider.

→ And with each step that we take in the process, what is happening in our relationship with God? We get farther and farther and farther away from Him. And it's all our own doing, even when we wonder to ourselves, “Why is God turning away or ignoring me?”

✘ These are just a few examples of the “wicked” and “unrighteous” ways and thoughts that our text is talking about in verse seven when it addresses the great difference between the sinful ways and thoughts of mankind and our LORD's ways and thoughts.

✘ Today's Gospel Reading is a wonderful parable from Jesus Himself about the great gulf between our way of doing things and the LORD's. The master of the house represents God who continues to seek out and bring souls in to enjoy and benefit from life in His vineyard work. Yet the very idea that someone who would join the work at the last hour and still receive the same compensation as those who have been doing it all day is viewed by us and our world as a totally crazy way of thinking! It's just not a good “business model” is it?

→ But God's economy of saving souls is nowhere near the way of this world. He does not submit to things like financial profit or gaining power or doing what those in this self-centered world thinks of as “profitable” and “fair”.

II. The LORD's thoughts and ways are closer and higher.

✘ No, our Lord and God does the exact opposite of what we define as “fair” or even “just”. Take a look at our text in Isaiah again, beginning with the second part of verse seven. “...let him return to the LORD, that He may have compassion on him, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon”.

→ There Isaiah reveals the great passion and desire of our all-powerful and immense Creator. He actually wants to be near us folks, in spite of the perversion of our sin-corrupted souls! Ezekiel 33:11 relays God's desire to us. “As I live, declares the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel?”

→ Yes, He invites you and me to turn away from our worldly thoughts and our selfish ways of sin and return to Him in humble sorrow and repentance for our sin. And don't misunderstand

this call from the LORD to mean that we can do any of this by our own power. No, we are still the humble creatures who are unable to do anything good on our own.

✘ Instead our Lord takes the initiative and not only invites us, He spreads before us the entire table, filled to overflowing with His power and grace; with His feast of salvation and He invites us merely to partake.

→ It's similar to a generous host who invites his guests to enter his dining room and enjoy a meal. The host says things like "come", "sit", "eat", but his purpose is to welcome, invite, feed and give his guests the fruits of His labor from a generous and compassionate heart.

✘ So it is that the LORD assures you and me here today that He can be "found"; that He is "near" to us! So near that He forgives our inability to live according to His demands – those times that we respond in envy or anger or judgement or silence toward our neighbor as we talked about before.

→ Yes, He forgives even our inability to understand and grasp how truly inspiring and life-changing His ways and His thoughts are compared to ours.

✘ Earlier I mentioned that the LORD's ways do not comply to the world's concept of what is fair or just. In fact, His way of showing us compassion and granting us salvation is by treating both us and His very own Son in the most unjust and unfair way imaginable.

→ If everything was "fair", you and I folks, would be headed directly to hell – "do not pass go; do not collect \$100", or even a word of "tough luck pal". For "the wages of sin is death", says Romans 6:23.

→ Yet God, who is as far above us as the heavens are higher than the earth did the incomprehensible. He became one of us! He took on our human flesh and blood in His Son Jesus, born of the Virgin Mary – the only man ever to actually live on this earth in perfect harmony with the LORD's ways and thoughts.

→ And then He treated His sinless Son in a manner that is absolutely unfair and unjust. Romans 4:25 says, He "delivered (Him) up (to death) for our trespasses and raised (Him up from the grave) for our justification".

✘ Talk about blowing the mind. How could a truly loving and perfect God do such an unspeakable injustice against His only begotten Son? He did it because of His enormous love and compassion for you and me folks!

→ He did it because He truly does desire to be found by you and me in His gift of faith and to bring us near to Himself in forgiveness and grace and salvation this very day and forevermore.

→ So to help us in our struggle to understand His ways, the LORD reveals Himself to us in ways that our limited earthly minds are more able to grasp. We call them God's "Means of Grace".

→ He spoke to prophets like Isaiah and others, leading them by the Holy Spirit, to proclaim and record in writing His thoughts and ways; His Word of truth in both Law and Gospel so that we can hear it and read it and study it and grow to believe in it as Holy Scripture itself.

→ He instituted Holy Baptism where His Word is joined with common water as the Lord's way of drowning our sinful nature and bringing us back to life as new and forgiven children; adopted into God's family of believers forevermore.

→ And Jesus connects us directly to His true body and blood that was given and shed on the cross for our salvation in the sacrament of Holy Communion, where He feeds us with His grace and He strengthens us in faith to live in Him and share His love with each other and all the world each and every day.

→ These are His “means”; His earthly conduits; His heavenly ways of bringing us into His saving grace.

Conclusion

⌘ Many or most of you remember I’m sure, one of Frank Sinatra’s most famous songs, “*I Did It My Way*”. We can only be thankful this morning and sing in praise today that our God has done things “His way” when it comes to dealing with us!

→ Even as He is infinitely above us; higher than we can ever imagine, He is now nevertheless right here with us in His Son, our Savior, Jesus and His gifts. Yes, in Jesus we are closer than ever before with our God; living by His grace in His higher way of life! Amen.