

October 12, 2014  
Pentecost 18

*"Seek the Lord While He May Be Found"*

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## ISAIAH 55:6-9

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**S**eek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near. <sup>7</sup> Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon. <sup>8</sup> "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD. <sup>9</sup> "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

There is a story about a bald eagle that drowned in the thundering waters of the Niagara Falls. It was a cold winter day when the eagle spotted the carcass of a deer on an ice floe that was floating down the river towards the falls. The eagle landed on the deer carcass and sunk its sharp talons into the partially frozen meat. Voraciously it began tearing at the tasty meat with its beak. The eagle was not worried about the approaching falls because it knew it could fly away at the last minute. It tried to fly away at the last minute but it could not because its talons were frozen tight in the carcass. It was pulled over the falls and dashed to the rocks below. It waited too long to let go.

God's Old Testament people were holding on to a lifestyle that would cause them to perish eternally if they did not let go and repent. They were combining the worship of the true God with the worship of the false god Baal. Isaiah pleads with the people to seek the Lord while he may be found. Tomorrow would be too late.

The time to come back to the Lord is always today and not tomorrow. A construction worker invited his good friend to join him in church on Sunday. The friend told him he wasn't ready to get involved with religion at this busy time of his life. That night he died on the way home from work in a tragic accident on the freeway. The time to come back to the Lord is always now, not tomorrow or the next day. The theme for our sermon today is: "Seek the Lord While He May Be Found."

### **Seek the Lord now**

"Seek the Lord while he may be found; call on him while he is near." The prophet Isaiah is speaking for the Lord and pleading with people to come back to the Lord while they still had the opportunity. In Isaiah 65 the Lord says, "Here am I, here am I. All day long I have held out my hands to an obstinate people who walk in ways not good, pursuing their own imaginations." We think of the father in Jesus' story of the lost son, eagerly watching and waiting and hoping and praying for his son to come to his senses and come home. How many people do you have on your prayer list who need to come home to the Lord before it is too late? We hear the voice of Jesus calling, "Come to me and I will give you rest."

Our Sunday morning Bible class is engaged in a study of the Noah, the ark and the great world flood. What stands out in the account in Genesis is God's fervent desire to have people repent before the waters of the great flood inundate the world. 2 Peter 3 tells us that the Lord our God has delayed the destruction of the world in which we live with fire because he longs for people to come back to him while they still have the time. "He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to

perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”

A couple weeks ago, I invited an elderly man to join us for our Bible study in Matthew at the Santa Maria Terrace. He was sitting in his motorized chair in the same room where we were holding our Bible study. At the very mention of Bible study, he wheeled his chair around and shot out of the room as fast as possible. How much the Lord our God wants this man and all people to seek him while he still can be found.

The Lord wants wicked people to seek him by forsaking their ways and thoughts, and turning to the Lord for mercy. “Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the Lord and he will have mercy.” This morning we ask ourselves the question, “Who are the wicked people mentioned here?” It is easy to spot the wicked people in the Old Testament who worshipped Baal instead of God and even sacrificed their own children to this false god Baal. The Lord describes these people in Isaiah 1: “Ah, sinful nation, a people loaded with guilt, and a brood of evil doers, children given to corruption.” It is easy to spot the wicked and evil doers who in our world today, those who engage in gruesome terrorist activities or flaunt their immoral lifestyles. It is easy to see the wicked in our immediate neighborhoods, those who are immoral, drunk and mean to one another. It is easy to feel rather good about ourselves and our behavior until we realize that the word “wicked” applies to all people who fail to measure up to God’s standard of holiness and perfection. The book of Romans was not exaggerating when it says, “There is none who does good, no not one.” How often I have failed to put the Lord first in my life this past week. When I sink my talons into sin then there is no hope for me. I am lost. I will perish forever.

The Lord also wants all people, including you and me, to give up this false hope that we can do something on our own to make things right with our God. Putting lipstick on a pig does not make that pig a movie star. It is part of my sinful nature to think that I can do something on the surface to make myself look better in the eyes of other people and even in the eyes of God.

About a month ago, a couple in their sixties was walking on Avila Pier during one of those beautiful evenings. They stopped, pulled out a cell phone, and tried to take a picture of themselves. Their attempt at a “selfie” turned out terrible. Fortunately, someone came along to take their picture and they had a nice smiling picture of themselves to send to their children. I won’t say who the couple was. Capture the best moments of your life and they will always fail to measure up to God’s glory. God wants us to forsake the false hope of thinking we can superficially do something to get rid of sin and earn his favor. Our God, our loving Father, who sent his Son Jesus to rescue us, wants us to turn to him. He wants us to do this today, not tomorrow, so he can have mercy on us.

### **Seek the Lord and his forgiveness**

You see dear Christian, the Lord wants to have mercy on you. He offers you his forgiveness without cost, even though it cost Jesus’ his death on the cross to pay for that sin. “Let him turn to the Lord and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon.” At the beginning of this chapter the Lord makes this amazing offer to his people. “Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come buy wine and milk without money and without cost.”

The book of Isaiah is a treasure trove of gospel gems. After telling his people how corrupted they were in their sin, the Lord gives them this amazing offer of forgiveness. “Come, now, let us reason together. Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.” Here is how Isaiah 53 describes this free forgiveness won for us by Christ. “He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him and by his wounds we are healed.” Look at any

moment in the life of Jesus. Watch him live the perfect life you could not live. Watch him make the perfect sacrifice at the cross so the heavenly Father can pronounce you freely forgiven through him.

There is no cost. There is no cost. Romans 3 says, "We are justified freely by this grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. The other day Albertsons offered me some stamps that I can put into a stamp book and use to redeem some product. I don't have to buy anything to get forgiveness through Jesus. It is totally free, without cost. Martin Luther said, "If God were willing to sell his grace we would accept it more quickly and gladly than when he offers it for nothing." You have heard it said, and perhaps you have also said, "There is no free lunch." Usually when someone offers you something free, there are strings attached. A non practicing Muslim once told me he could never believe in the Bible because he wanted nothing to do with a religion that offered a dying thief eternal life in Paradise without asking him to do something to earn that Paradise.

The other evening my wife and I were walking and we saw a large television on the front of a driveway with the words on it, "Free TV."

It was one of those old large television with a 40 inch screen that weighed about 150 pounds. The next night the free television was still there. No one wants those old televisions. They have no value. Everyone wants a new flat screen television and the price on them keeps coming down. Every day the gospel message goes out into the world. People turn their noses up at the free forgiveness that Jesus offers, not because it has no value such as that old television, but because they cannot grasp with their sinful human hearts that everything has been done for them in Christ. They don't want to give up believing they can do something to earn their forgiveness.

How true it is that God's ways are not our ways especially when it comes to freely forgiving us through Jesus. "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 higher than your thoughts." In our natural condition we do not want to accept the things of God because they are foolishness to us. We want God on our terms especially when it comes to thinking forgiveness is something we earn rather than being earned for us by Jesus. God's ways are above our ways. 1 Corinthians says, "The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them because they are spiritually discerned."

What an amazing story Jesus told in our gospel lesson for today. Everyone working in the vineyard gets paid the same whether they worked for twelve hours, eleven hours six hours or one hour. The owner of the vineyard said, "Don't I have the right to do what I want with my money?" Doesn't the Lord our God have the right to determine how he wants to save us? God knows every move we make in life. He does not need a cell phone to record our sinful thoughts and actions to show us where we have gone wrong. He also knew every move Jesus made in his life. He accepted the life his Son lived for us, and the death he died for us, by raising him from the dead. This forgiveness is real. The Lord wants all people to leave behind trusting in themselves and turning to him for forgiveness. "Seek the Lord while he may be found." Amen.