

Isaiah 55:6-11

⁶Seek the LORD while he may be found!
Call on him while he is near!

⁷Let the wicked man abandon his way.
Let an evil man abandon his thoughts.

Let him turn to the LORD,
and he will show him mercy.

Let him turn to our God,
because he will abundantly pardon.

⁸Certainly my plans are not your plans,
and your ways are not my ways, declares the LORD.

⁹Just as the heavens are higher than the earth,
so my ways are higher than your ways,
and my plans are higher than your plans.

¹⁰Just as the rain and the snow come down from the sky
and do not return there

unless they first water the earth, make it give birth, and cause it to sprout,
so that it gives seed to the sower and bread to the eater,

¹¹in the same way my word that goes out from my mouth
will not return to me empty.

Rather, it will accomplish whatever I please,
and it will succeed in the purpose for which I sent it.

While He May Be Found

I.

There is a problem. You don't have to look very hard or very far to find it. The problem is evil—wickedness.

One TV show in particular identifies the problem and accentuates it and puts it into the context of life—the news. Every day you can see the evidence of twisted and demented human beings. This one kidnaps a child who is not his own; not content with kidnaping alone, he murders the little girl. That one rapes many women and manages to conceal it for decades before he is finally identified and brought to justice.

Stories like these pepper the news every day. Unless you are like the proverbial ostrich and just stick your head in the sand so you won't see the evil, you know it is there. It disgusts you. Sometimes it even makes you sick. But it's always there. It cannot be escaped.

Isaiah says: "Let the wicked man abandon his way. Let an evil man abandon his thoughts" (Isaiah 55:7, EHV). What a wonderful concept, isn't it? Wouldn't it be great if these perpetrators of violence that dominate each day's news would abandon their thoughts and ways and act like decent human beings?

II.

Last week's readings, however, reminded us how impossible such a thing is. In last week's Gospel Jesus said that the things of salvation are: "hidden...from clever and learned people" (Matthew 11:25, EHV). The clever and learned think they know everything they need to know. They are just fine with their wicked thoughts and ways. Perhaps they don't think their thoughts and ways *are* all that wicked or evil.

Then comes what the Apostle Paul said in last week's Second Reading: "I fail to do the good I want to do. Instead, the evil I do not want to do, that is what I keep doing" (Romans 7:19, EHV). Sin is such a problem that it creates a separation between the sinner and God.

A person might want with all his or her might to get right with God, but how is one to do it? It's impossible. On our own, a separation that has been created by our own sin cannot be repaired or overcome.

Back to what Isaiah said: "Let the wicked man abandon his way. Let an evil man abandon his thoughts. Let him turn to the LORD, and he will show him mercy. Let him turn to our God, because he will abundantly pardon" (Isaiah 55:7, EHV). The incentive is there. The promise is that the Lord, the God of full and faithful grace, is ready to show mercy and abundantly pardon. Mercy and pardon are available for even the worst sinner.

When viewing the footage of a trial, often the perpetrator on trial looks cold and unfeeling. There seems to be a complete lack of desire to abandon evil thoughts and ways.

But it isn't just those who seem to be pure evil who cannot, will not, don't even *want* to abandon evil thoughts and ways. You cannot. I cannot. As Paul said, we might *want* to and *try* to—desperately. But again and again we fail.

"Certainly my plans are not your plans, and your ways are not my ways, declares the LORD.⁹ Just as the heavens are higher than the earth, so my ways are higher than your ways, and my plans are higher than your plans" (Isaiah 55:8-9, EHV). What separates us from God is sin. We can't even begin to fathom what a great gulf that separation is. We throw around words like "perfect" and "holy" to describe God, but we are incapable of comprehending perfect and holy.

At times we are fooled into thinking that we are pretty good. *We're* not on the news accused of a crime; *we* haven't been hauled away in handcuffs. But then the Apostle James reminds us: "Whoever keeps the whole law but stumbles in one point has become guilty of breaking all of it" (James 2:10, EHV). Think about it a little bit more and you realize it isn't just one point—it's many points. The reality is that our whole being is so permeated with sin we can't imagine an existence without it.

"Just as the heavens are higher than the earth," Isaiah wrote. Look up at the night sky and contemplate how far away the stars are. That high are God's plans above ours and his ways above ours.

III.

God's thoughts and plans are so much higher than ours and so much loftier than ours that we don't stand a chance of finding him. This despite the fact that we are told: "Seek the LORD while he may be found! Call on him while he is near!" (Isaiah 55:6, EHV). How could we possibly find him, when God is so far above us—so much holier than us—so much more righteous than us.

"Seek the Lord" tells us that he wants us. Though by nature God is so far above us, he has come near to us to make himself available. Though by nature we couldn't possibly *find* God, he wants to be found; he *wants* you and me.

"Just as the rain and the snow come down from the sky and do not return there unless they first water the earth, make it give birth, and cause it to sprout, so that it gives seed to the sower and bread to the eater, ¹¹in the same way my word that goes out from my mouth will not return to me empty. Rather, it will accomplish whatever I please, and it will succeed in the purpose for which I sent it." (Isaiah 55:10-11, EHV).

May and June left west Michigan in a moderate to severe drought. In the first two weeks of July, my rain gauge indicates 5.3 inches of rain to alleviate my parched lawn. 3.4 inches of that fell Wednesday night.

God speaks of rain and snow that water the earth. The Hebrew word does not just mean the sprinkler you turn on to keep your thirsty plants alive, it means to thoroughly saturate, just like Wednesday night's rain.

God's Word is like that. It is a life-giving, life-sustaining witness to us. God has spoken by the prophets. God is not a God of silence. He wants to be found.

Throughout history, many words have been written down. We have ancient literature—the classics. We have modern stories. We have fiction and non-fiction. History, philosophy, poetry, prose. Of all the words spoken throughout history, God's Word is unique. Only God's Word is able to consistently do what it says. Only God's Word can create and sustain faith.

The writer to the Hebrews says: "In the past, God spoke to our forefathers by the prophets at many times and in many ways. ²In these last days, he has spoken to us by his Son" (Hebrews 1:1-2, EHV). Jesus is the living embodiment of the Word of God. John began his gospel by identifying Jesus as the very Word himself. God's Word has come to us in a much more personal way than the written or spoken word. Jesus is God's message to us.

In this week's Gospel, Jesus tells the parable of the sower and the seed. One of my favorite hymns—one I didn't pick for today, but made you sing at my 25th anniversary in the ministry—is "Preach You the Word." One verse says: "The sower sows; his reckless love scatters abroad the goodly seed" (Christian Worship 895). Pastors are to have a reckless love—preaching the gospel even to those who might be seen as undeserving. But the hymn writer also spoke about the reckless love of God. He has loved us—where love isn't deserved. He has loved everyone—even when he knows his love will often be rejected and scorned.

Remember the wicked and evil thoughts and ways that we are really not capable of dealing with? God so wanted you and me to be found that in his reckless love he sent Jesus to deal with all the wickedness that made our relationship with God impossible. Last week we talked about Jesus being yoked—or connected—to the burden of our sin. He connected himself to that sin and nailed it to the cross. God has accepted Christ's payment for our sin. We were created to be in fellowship with God. The Word—Jesus—has restored that fellowship.

The melted snow and the rain water the earth. Seeds sprout and grow and produce crops, by which God sustains human life on this earth.

The seed of God's Word sown by the Sower's reckless love creates faith in our hearts. That same reckless love shown in his Word enables the seed to grow and bear the fruits of faith to the glory of God.

IV.

"Seek the LORD while he may be found!" (Isaiah 55:6, EHV). The Lord found *you*. Jesus said: "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit" (John 15:16, EHV).

God's plans are so much higher than ours and his ways completely unfathomable by our human minds. God told Jeremiah: "I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD...plans to give you hope and a future" (Jeremiah 29:11, EHV). God's plan for you is salvation—purchased and won for you by Jesus, made your own by the faith given to you by the Holy Spirit in baptism.

Whenever you feel lost and want to find him... Better put, when you feel lost and *need* to be found *by* him, you know where to look. He is where his Word is. His Word is in your baptism, which you are to put on again every day as you drown the old Adam and the new self comes out to live before God yet again. His Word is in the Supper of your Lord Jesus, given and poured out for you to strengthen and sustain you in your walk of faith.

Each time you look for him, realize he has been searching for *you*. How do you know you are secure in his relationship? You have his Word. He is there for you always. Amen.