

SERMON for Sunday, August 16 and Wed. August 19, 2020

Pent 11A Isaiah 56:1-8 “God Has Brought Us to His Holy Mountain.”

Dear fellow redeemed of the Lord Jesus Christ today’s Old Testament Lesson from Isaiah is the beginning of the third main section of the prophet’s writing. The first portion of verse 1 reads, “**Thus says the LORD: ‘Keep justice, and do righteousness,**” sums up God’s message to us from chapters 1-39 of Isaiah.

The rest of the verse, “**...for my salvation is near in coming and my righteousness is being revealed,**” summarizes the second portion of Isaiah, chapters 40-55.

The remaining verses of our text, no doubt scandalized Isaiah’s original Jewish readers because the prophet foresaw the extension of God’s Kingdom to all the peoples of the earth, as gentiles would be allowed to worship in the Lord’s Holy House.

Even though the universal nature of the Lord God’s rule should have been clear in His covenantal promise to Abraham that he **would be the father of many nations**, the Jews had long-ago moved away from this understanding.

The new Concordia commentary on Isaiah explains: “***Israel was never intended to exist in isolation. Yahweh’s mandate was clear: the nation was to be His missionary to the world. When Israel embraced the lie that she could keep Yahweh and his blessings to herself, then all was lost.*** PAUSE

With this as our background, you may recall that Jesus lamented over Jerusalem, “**O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city of that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you would not!**”

The religious leaders of Jesus day didn’t want Him to gather them, or anyone else to Himself! They questioned his authority at every turn. They said demons empowered His miracles. And finally, they did just as Jesus predicted; they successfully plotted to kill the greatest Prophet of all, the incarnate Word.

As we read the scripture accounts, out of love for Jesus, we heap scorn on the religious leaders of Jesus’ day, yet we are no different. We, by nature, resist God’s gracious calling.

God calls to Himself those who are faithful, holy, and righteous. Yet as we confessed a few minutes ago, we are poor miserable sinners. We, like a child going through the terrible twos or a rebellious teenager, continually offend our Holy Father.

By nature, we want no part of God's grace or His gifts, so we resist His attempts to gather us to Himself.

We want to go our own, separate way. And if not for God's gracious long-suffering patience, we'd get what we asked for: eternal separation from God in Hell.

PAUSE

Jesus likened God's love for us to a mother hen tending her brood. Yet what a mother hen does for her young chicks is nothing compared with the love God has for fallen humanity.

You see, God wants to gather you and all the rest of His faith-filled people to Himself, ***not just for a little while, as a hen hovering her chicks, but forever.***

It was God who knit you together and placed you in the temple of your mother's womb. It was God who sent the Holy Spirit to you to reside in you, and to create your faith in Christ, which is the sole basis of you living forever in His kingdom.

And it is God who gathers you and your fellow Christians into the church, where our faith is created and nourished as we gather around Word and Sacrament. **PAUSE**

As I said earlier, the final three verses of today's lesson would have scandalized Jewish readers, by indicating that foreigners would minister within the House of the LORD! God would accept their burnt offerings, sacrifices, and prayers.

“Foreigners who bind themselves to the Lord to serve him, to love the name of the Lord, and to worship him, all who keep the Sabbath without desecrating it and who hold fast to my covenant—these I will bring to my holy mountain and give them joy in my house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations.”

Isaiah had spoken earlier of God's holy mountain in chapter 25. There the Spirit inspired him to write, **“On this mountain the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all people...on this mountain...he will swallow up death forever.”**

That would seem to indicate the fulfillment of this blessed promise will take place in the courts of the heavenly Jerusalem, the everlasting Mt. Zion, at Christ's 2nd coming.

Yet God is timeless, and in Christ, he has already destroyed death. That being the case, where do we who are gentiles serve God on His Holy Mountain in the present day?

Well, this side of heaven, the church is God's holy mountain. The church is God's house of prayer. The church is God's earthly Mt. Zion because here is where God freely gives gifts to His people called from all nations.

Here in this church, this earthly Mt. Zion, God gives you the gifts which Christ won for you on the cross—the forgiveness of sin, salvation, and eternal life.

Here is where we declare that by the blood the sinless Lamb of God shed for us on the cross, your sins are forgiven, as you heard me announce a few minutes ago.

God loves you and wants to gather you together under the shadow of His almighty wings on His Holy Mountain.

That's why the Holy Spirit has gathered us here in this sanctuary, to hear God's Word read from His scriptures and expounded upon in the sermon each week so that our weary souls would be fed.

As Isaiah foresaw, even though I'm a sinful gentile, my prayers are heard in this house of prayer.

Even though I'm a sinful gentile, when I speak His words over the bread and wine of the Sacrament, Christ's body and blood, given and shed for you, are truly present in, with, and under them, delivering you from condemnation and strengthening your faith. **PAUSE**

Today, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ, there is no need for us to offer up sacrifices like the people in Isaiah's time.

Why? Because the Lord Jesus Christ offered up a perfect, once and for all time, sacrifice on the altar of the cross. God has established a new covenant with us, and the old testament sacrificial system has been done away with.

Christ's sinless life, His perfect righteousness, His selfless good works are the only good works that could and did satisfy God's holy demands.

Yet in response to the love our Lord has first shown us, even though **we don't have to**, **we get to** bring our offerings of time, talents, and treasure for the work of His Kingdom.

We get to serve our neighbors, praying for the whole people of God in Christ and for all people, according to their needs. For this house is a house of prayer, and those are our spiritual sacrifices, done not to gain God's favor, but as a sign that we already enjoy it.

We get to bring comfort to those in need, showing others the love that God has first shown us. We get to witness to others of God's love for them in Christ, and

in doing so, the Holy Spirit at work within us, fulfilling Isaiah prophesy, **“I will gather yet others to Him besides those already gathered.”**

As the catechism teaches, **“The Holy Spirit has called, gathered, enlightened and sanctified us and the whole Christian church, and will keep it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith.”**

But there will come a time when even the church’s ministry will become obsolete.

When Jesus returns, He will **“raise us and all the dead and give eternal life to us and all believers in Christ.”**

For now, by faith, we cling to and learn from Jesus. By faith, in worship, we speak back to God the promises he made to us in Baptism. By faith, we receive a foretaste of the feast to come.

But on that great and glorious day when Christ returns, God will call us from our tombs to be gathered under his eternal wings around the throne of heaven.

In light of that great promise, we bow our heads and pray, **“Lord, Jesus, thank you for gathering us into your Kingdom and giving us your Holy name in Baptism.**

Graciously gather more people of every nation into your house of prayer until all your blessed ones meet again at the Grand Reunion of God’s children in heaven.” AMEN.