

St. John's Lutheran Church (LCMS)

8948 N 1900 Ave Geneseo, IL 61254

309-949-2516

September 20, 2020

Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost

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Confession and Absolution

Hymn of Invocation: 555 Salvation unto Us Has Come (sts. 1-5)

Tune and Text: Public domain



1 Sal - va - tion un - to us has come By God's free grace and  
2 What God did in His Law de - mand And none to Him could  
3 It was a false, mis - lead - ing dream That God His Law had  
4 From sin our flesh could not ab - stain, Sin held its sway un -



fa - vor; Good works can - not a - vert our doom, They  
ren - der Caused wrath and woe on ev - 'ry hand For  
giv - en That sin - ners could them - selves re - deem And  
ceas - ing; The task was use - less and in vain, Our



help and save us nev - er. Faith looks to Je - sus  
man, the vile of - fend - er. Our flesh has not those  
by their works gain heav - en. The Law is but a  
guilt was e'er in - creas - ing. None can re - move sin's



Christ a - lone, Who did for all the  
pure de - sires The spir - it of the  
mir - ror bright To bring the in - bred  
poi - soned dart Or pu - ri - fy our



world a - tone; He is our one Re - deem - er.  
Law re - quires, And lost is our con - di - tion.  
sin to light That lurks with - in our na - ture.  
guile - ful heart— So deep is our cor - rup - tion.

- 5 Yet as the Law must be fulfilled  
Or we must die despairing,  
Christ came and has God's anger stilled,  
Our human nature sharing.  
He has for us the Law obeyed  
And thus the Father's vengeance stayed  
Which over us impended.

Stand

The sign of the cross may be made by all in remembrance of their Baptism.

- P** In the name of the Father and of the  $\text{†}$  Son and of the Holy Spirit.
- C** Amen.
- P** Beloved in the Lord! Let us draw near with a true heart and confess our sins unto God our Father, beseeching Him in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to grant us forgiveness.
- P** Our help is in the name of the Lord,
- C** who made heaven and earth.
- P** I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord,
- C** and You forgave the iniquity of my sin.

Silence for reflection on God's Word and for self-examination.

- P** O almighty God, merciful Father,
- C** I, a poor, miserable sinner, confess unto You all my sins and iniquities with which I have ever offended You and justly deserved Your temporal and eternal punishment. But I am heartily sorry for them and sincerely repent of them, and I pray You of Your boundless mercy and for the sake of the holy, innocent, bitter sufferings and death of Your beloved Son, Jesus Christ, to be gracious and merciful to me, a poor, sinful being.
- P** Upon this your confession, I, by virtue of my office, as a called and ordained servant of the Word, announce the grace of God unto all of you, and in the stead and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the  $\text{†}$  Son and of the Holy Spirit.
- C** Amen.

Service of the Word

Introit (Psalm 116:12-13, 15-16; antiphon: v. 17)

I will offer to you the sacrifice of thanksgiving  
and call on the name of the LORD.  
What shall I render to the LORD  
for all his benefits to me?

**I will lift up the cup of salvation  
and call on the name of the LORD.**

Precious in the sight of the LORD  
is the death of his saints.

**O LORD, I am your servant;**

**I am your servant, the son of your maidservant. You  
have loosed my bonds.**

**Glory be to the Father and to the Son  
and to the Holy Spirit;**

**as it was in the beginning,  
is now, and will be forever. Amen.**

I will offer to you the sacrifice of thanksgiving  
and call on the name of the LORD.

### Salutation and Collect of the Day

**P** The Lord be with you.

**G** And with thy spirit.

**P** Let us pray.

Lord God, heavenly Father, since we cannot stand before  
You relying on anything we have done, help us trust in Your  
abiding grace and live according to Your Word; through  
Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with  
You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

**G** Amen.

*Sit*

### Old Testament Reading

*Isaiah 55:6-9, on back of bulletin*

**A** This is the Word of the Lord.

**G** Thanks be to God.

### Gradual

*Psalm 34:9, 19, alt.*

Fear the LORD, you his saints,  
for those who fear him lack nothing!

**Many are the afflictions of the righteous,  
but the LORD delivers him out of them all.**

### Epistle

*Philippians 1:12-14, 19-30, on back of bulletin*

**A** This is the Word of the Lord.

**G** Thanks be to God.

*Stand*

### Holy Gospel

*Matthew 20:1-16, on back of bulletin*

**P** The Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew, the twentieth  
chapter.

**G** Glory be to Thee, O Lord.

*After the reading*

**P** This is the Gospel of the Lord.

**G** Praise be to Thee, O Christ.

### Nicene Creed

**C** I believe in one God,  
the Father Almighty,  
maker of heaven and earth  
and of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ,  
the only-begotten Son of God,  
begotten of His Father before all worlds,  
God of God, Light of Light,  
very God of very God,  
begotten, not made,  
being of one substance with the Father,  
by whom all things were made;  
who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven  
and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary  
and was made man;  
and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate.  
He suffered and was buried.  
And the third day He rose again according to the Scriptures  
and ascended into heaven  
and sits at the right hand of the Father.  
And He will come again with glory to judge both the living  
and the dead,  
whose kingdom will have no end.

And I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the Lord and giver of life,  
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,  
who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and  
glorified,  
who spoke by the prophets.  
And I believe in one holy Christian and apostolic Church,  
I acknowledge one Baptism for the remission of sins,  
and I look for the resurrection of the dead  
and the life  $\text{✠}$  of the world to come. Amen.

*Sit*

### Hymn of the Day: 555 Salvation unto Us Has Come (sts. 6-10)

6 Since Christ has full atonement made  
And brought to us salvation,  
Each Christian therefore may be glad  
And build on this foundation.  
Your grace alone, dear Lord, I plead,

Your death is now my life indeed,  
For You have paid my ransom.

7 Let me not doubt, but truly see  
Your Word cannot be broken;  
Your call rings out, "Come unto Me!"  
No falsehood have You spoken.  
Baptized into Your precious name,  
My faith cannot be put to shame,  
And I shall never perish.

8 The Law reveals the guilt of sin  
And makes us conscience-stricken;  
But then the Gospel enters in  
The sinful soul to quicken.  
Come to the cross, trust Christ, and live;  
The Law no peace can ever give,  
No comfort and no blessing.

9 Faith clings to Jesus' cross alone  
And rests in Him unceasing;  
And by its fruits true faith is known,  
With love and hope increasing.  
For faith alone can justify;  
Works serve our neighbor and supply  
The proof that faith is living.

△ 10 All blessing, honor, thanks, and praise  
To Father, Son, and Spirit,  
The God who saved us by His grace;  
All glory to His merit.  
O triune God in heav'n above,  
You have revealed Your saving love;  
Your blessed name we hallow.

## Sermon

### Prayer of the Church

#### Prayer of the Church

Ⓟ Almighty God, we give thanks for all Your goodness and bless You for the love that sustains us from day to day. We praise You for the gift of Your Son, our Savior, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. We thank You for the Holy Spirit, the Comforter; for Your holy Church, for the means of grace, for the lives of all faithful and just people, and for the hope of the life to come. Help us to treasure in our hearts all that You have done for us, and enable us to show

our thankfulness in lives that are wholly given to Your service. Lord, in Your mercy,

Ⓞ **hear our prayer.**

Ⓟ Save and defend Your whole Church, purchased with the precious blood of Christ. Strengthen Your faithful people through the Word and the holy Sacraments, making them perfect in love and in all good works, and establishing in them the faith once delivered to the saints. Lord, in Your mercy,

Ⓞ **hear our prayer.**

Ⓟ Grant Your wisdom and heavenly grace to all pastors and to those who hold office in Your Church that, by their devoted service, faith may abound and Your kingdom increase. Lord, in Your mercy,

Ⓞ **hear our prayer.**

Ⓟ Send the light of Your truth into all the earth. Raise up faithful servants of Christ to advance the Gospel both at home and in distant lands. Lord, in Your mercy,

Ⓞ **hear our prayer.**

Ⓟ In Your mercy strengthen newly established congregations, and support them in challenging times. Make them steadfast, abounding in the work of the Lord, and let their faith and zeal for the Gospel refresh and renew the witness of Your people everywhere. Lord, in Your mercy,

Ⓞ **hear our prayer.**

Ⓟ Preserve our nation in justice and honor that we may lead a peaceable life with integrity. Grant health and favor to all who bear office in our land, especially the president and congress of the United States, the governor and legislature of this state, and to all those who make, administer, and judge our laws. Help them to serve this people according to Your holy will. Grant the citizens of our land honor and respect for the rule of law so that lives and property would be protected and civil society may be preserved. Lord, in Your mercy,

Ⓞ **hear our prayer.**

Ⓟ Take from us all hatred and prejudice, give us the spirit of love, and order our days in Your peace. Prosper the labor of those who work to bring peace and justice to the nations of the world that mutual understanding and common endeavor may be increased among all peoples. Lord, in Your mercy,

Ⓞ **hear our prayer.**

Ⓟ Bless the schools of the Church and all colleges, universities, and centers of research and those who teach and work in them. Grant Your wisdom in such measure that people may serve You honorably in Church and state, and that our common life may be conformed to the ways of Your truth. Lord,

in Your mercy,

**C** **hear our prayer.**

**P** Sanctify our homes with Your presence, and bless them with joy. Keep our children in the covenant of their Baptism, and enable their parents to bring them up in lives of faith and devotion. Unite the members of all families in a spirit of affection and service that they may show Your praise in our land and in all the world. Lord, in Your mercy,

**C** **hear our prayer.**

**P** Let Your blessing remain upon the seedtime and harvest, the commerce and industry, the leisure and rest, the arts and culture of our people. Take under Your special protection those whose work is difficult or dangerous, and be with all who put their hands to any useful task. Give them the just rewards for their labor and the knowledge that their work is a blessing in Your sight. Lord, in Your mercy,

**C** **hear our prayer.**

**P** Thank You for Your protection and healing given to Marie and Evelyn, and continue to hold them in Your gracious care. By Your Word and Holy Spirit comfort all who are in sorrow or need, especially those who have suffered disaster from the recent storm, and all who are in sickness or adversity, especially Claris, Joseph, Pam, Paula, Jim and Shirley, Luke, Don, John, Bob, Betty, Arlyn, Derek, Harley, Lillian, Lynne, Clinton's Family, Jodi, Mike, Virginia, Jim, Chuck and his family, Marilyn, Casey, Jim, Mike, Drew, Kathleen, Kelly, Carolyn, Carolyn, Marilyn, and Karen. Be with those who suffer persecution for the faith. Have mercy on those to whom death draws near. Bring consolation to those in sorrow, and grant to all a measure of Your love, taking them into Your tender care. Lord, in Your mercy,

**C** **hear our prayer.**

**P** We remember with thanksgiving those who have loved and served You in Your Church on earth, who now rest from their labors. Keep us in fellowship with all Your saints, and bring us at last to the joys of Your heavenly kingdom. Lord, in Your mercy,

**C** **hear our prayer.**

**P** All these things and whatever else You know that we need, grant us, Father, for the sake of Him who died and rose again and now lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God forever.

**C** **Amen.**

## Lord's Prayer

**C** **Our Father who art in heaven,  
hallowed be Thy name,  
Thy kingdom come,  
Thy will be done on earth  
as it is in heaven;  
give us this day our daily bread;  
and forgive us our trespasses  
as we forgive those  
who trespass against us;  
and lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.  
For Thine is the kingdom  
and the power and the glory  
forever and ever. Amen.**

## Concluding Collect for Blessing on the Word

**P** Let us pray.

Lord Jesus Christ, giver and perfecter of our faith, we thank and praise You for continuing among us the preaching of Your Gospel for our instruction and edification. Send Your blessing upon the Word, which has been spoken to us, and by Your Holy Spirit increase our saving knowledge of You, that day by day we may be strengthened in the divine truth and remain steadfast in Your grace. Give us strength to fight the good fight and by faith to overcome all the temptations of Satan, the flesh, and the world so that we may finally receive the salvation of our souls; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

**C** **Amen.**

## Benedicamus

**P** Bless we the Lord.

**C** **Thanks be to God.**

## Benediction

**P** The Lord bless you and keep you.  
The Lord make His face shine upon you and be gracious unto you.

The Lord lift up His countenance upon you and ✠ give you peace.

**C** **Amen.**

*At this time the live streaming of the service will end. If anyone does not feel*

*comfortable receiving the Lord's Supper at this time they are welcome to depart. The worship concludes with the Service of the Sacrament.*

## Service of the Sacrament

### Preface

- P** The Lord be with you.  
**C** **And with thy spirit.**
- P** Lift up your hearts.  
**C** **We lift them up unto the Lord.**
- P** Let us give thanks unto the Lord, our God.  
**C** **It is meet and right so to do.**
- P** It is truly good, right, and salutary that we should at all times and in all places give thanks to You, holy Lord, almighty Father, everlasting God, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who, having created all things, took on human flesh and was born of the virgin Mary. For our sake He died on the cross and rose from the dead to put an end to death, thus fulfilling Your will and gaining for You a holy people. Therefore with angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven we laud and magnify Your glorious name, evermore praising You and saying:

### Sanctus

- C** **Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might: heaven and earth are full of Your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.**

### The Words of Institution

- P** Our Lord Jesus Christ, on the night when He was betrayed, took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it and gave it to the disciples and said: "Take, eat; this is My  $\text{✠}$  body, which is given for you. This do in remembrance of Me."

In the same way also He took the cup after supper, and when He had given thanks, He gave it to them, saying: "Drink of it, all of you; this cup is the new testament in My  $\text{✠}$  blood, which is shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me."

### Pax Domini

- P** The peace of the Lord be with you always.  
**C** **Amen.**

### Agnus Dei

- C** **O Christ, Thou Lamb of God, that takes away the sin of the world, have mercy upon us.**  
**O Christ, Thou Lamb of God, that takes away the sin of the world, have mercy upon us.**  
**O Christ, Thou Lamb of God, that takes away the sin of the world, grant us Thy peace. Amen.**

### Distribution

- P** The body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ strengthen and preserve you in body and soul to life everlasting. Depart  $\text{✠}$  in peace.  
**C** **Amen.**

### Nunc Dimittis

- C** **Lord, now let Thou Thy servant depart in peace according to Thy word, for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation, which Thou has prepared before the face of all people, a light to lighten the Gentiles and the glory of Thy people Israel.**  
**Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.**

### Thanksgiving

- P** O give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good,  
**C** **and His mercy endures forever.**
- P** Let us pray.  
O God the Father, the fountain and source of all goodness, who in loving-kindness sent Your only-begotten Son into the flesh, we thank You that for His sake You have given us pardon and peace in this Sacrament, and we ask You not to forsake Your children but always to rule our hearts and minds by Your Holy Spirit that we may be enabled constantly to serve You; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.  
**C** **Amen.**
- P** The Lord be with you.  
**C** **And with thy spirit.**

### Benedicamus

- P** Bless we the Lord.  
**C** **Thanks be to God.**

**Benediction**

- P** The almighty and merciful Lord, the Father, the ✠ Son, and the Holy Spirit, bless and preserve you.
- C** Amen.

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*Today we receive the gift of Holy Communion. Communion is an expression of faith and agreement. If you're our guest this morning, we don't want to place you in a position of agreement with our beliefs before you've had opportunity to study them. Therefore, if you're not a member of a Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod congregation, we invite you to speak with our pastor about this special opportunity, and request that you not partake of communion today. Thank you.*

**Acknowledgements**

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**ST. JOHN'S EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH-LCMS**

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 Website: www.stjohnsgeneseo.org  
<https://www.facebook.com/St.Johns.Geneseo>  
<https://www.facebook.comSt.JohnGLY>

**HEARING ASSISTANCE AVAILABLE**

**Rev. Timothy Nerud**

309-949-2516 (Office)  
 309-949-2517 (Home)  
 612-940-8138 (Cell)

**Pastor**

**+In God's Grace—In God's Service+**

- Elder: Mike Dahl
- Videographer: Joel Werling
- Ushers: Don Hock Family
- Organist: John Neumann

Today's Readings: Old Testament Reading: Isaiah 55:6-9  
 Epistle: Philippians 1:12-14, 19-30  
 Holy Gospel: Matthew 20:1-16

**WE PRAY:** Holy Spirit, Sanctifier of our souls, purge us of every obstacle to Christ's living in us that we may live and die in Christ; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who with You and the Father are one God with dominion over us forever. Amen

**WELCOME BACK TO ALL!**

We are anxious to share with you the Christ-centered ministry at St. John's. Our Liturgy follows closely the pattern of Word and Lord's Supper handed down from the ancient Church. It is our hope that you will make the Church's life of prayer your own. If you have difficulty following our order of service, please ask someone sitting near you for assistance. We pray that you will receive rich spiritual blessings from your presence here. May the peace and power of our risen Christ be yours always.

**IF YOU DESIRE** a visit or call from Pastor Nerud, please contact the church office (309-949-2516).

**OFFICE HOURS**

Terri's hours	(Monday—Friday)	8 am—12 pm
Pastor's hours	<b>(Monday, Pastor's day off)</b>	
	(Tuesday)	9 am—12 pm
	(Thursday)	9 am—12 pm & 1 pm—4 pm
	(Wednesday & Friday)	please call ahead.

**LIVE STREAMED SERVICES** are available on St. John's Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/St.Johns.Geneseo/> and posted on Monday on the church website: [www.stjohnsgeneseo.org](http://www.stjohnsgeneseo.org) found under the 'Sermon' tab and

**WEEKLY OFFERING**

Offering	\$2795.00
Weekly income needed per 2020 Budget	\$4,011.98

**THIS WEEK AT ST. JOHN'S**

Today	8:45 am	SS/Adult w/Youth Bible Study
	10:00 am	Divine Worship/Communion
Tuesday	6:30 pm	SS Teachers' meeting
Next Sunday	8:45 am	SS/Adult w/Youth Bible Study
	10:00 am	Divine Worship

*One thing I ask of the LORD, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and seek him in his temple.*  
*Psalm 27:4*

**Matthew 20:9** – “And when those hired about the eleventh hour came, each of them received a denarius.” Behold the generosity of God! He gives out of His grace, not what we deserve to receive. Living a godly life means living in imitation of God, and His generosity is surely one of the foundations of God's being.

**BIBLES & DEVOTIONAL MATERIALS**—LWML currently is not collecting these items. Please pass them on to another source. Thank you!

## PRAYER MINISTRY

*Rejoice in God's goodness in Christ as you pray:*

**MISSION**—Thank God for your pastor and all pastors. Pray that God would grant them faith and strength in their Word and Sacrament ministry.

**ST. JOHN'S—Ms. Lisa Peterson**—We offer before You our common request for the well-being of Your church throughout the world that it may be so guided and governed by Your good Spirit that all who profess themselves Christians may be led into the way of truth and hold the faith in unity of spirit in the bond of peace, and in righteousness of life. Specifically, we pray for Lisa and ask your blessing on her.

**ST. JOHN'S FAMILY**—O Lord, You are the great Physician of soul and body. We pray that You would show mercy to Your servants:

<b>Drew Schillinger</b>	<b>Jim Rahn</b>	<b>Carolyn Wildermuth</b>
<b>Arlyn Helke</b>	<b>Bob Esterlein</b>	<b>Lynne Johnson</b>
<b>Derek Helke</b>	<b>Lillian Hock</b>	<b>Jim/Shirley Dahl</b>
<b>Carolyn Werner</b>	<b>Betty Firch</b>	<b>Marilyn Woods</b>
<b>Paula Chapa</b>	<b>John Erdman</b>	<b>Luke Davila</b>
<b>Andrew Hill, Sarah, John, Daniel</b> (2019/2020 Seminary Student)		
<b>Don Eggers</b> (son of a friend of Marilyn Woods)		
<b>Mike Miller</b> (friend of Bob & Sherry Wechsler)		
<b>Jodi Martins</b> (daughter of Gary & Darla Johns)		
<b>Jon &amp; Anita Clausing</b> (missionaries in Kenya)		
<b>Marilyn Potts</b> (wife of Cal Potts, former St John Laborer For Christ)		
<b>Pam Bennett</b> (friend of Dan/Roselyn Maeltzer)		
<b>Karen Wright</b> (wife of Pastor Gary Wright)		
<b>Mike Rowlands</b> (friend of Arlyn/Marcia Helke)		
<b>Virginia Miller</b> (mother of Jamie Werling)		
<b>Casey Powers</b> (husband of Lisa (Bear) Powers)		
<b>Kelly Wechsler</b> (cousin of Bob Wechsler)		
<b>Kathleen VanDeRostyne</b> (friend of Bob & Sherry Wechsler)		
<b>Joseph Baamonde</b> (Friend of Paula Mooney)		
<b>Clinton Kane Family</b> (son of Sandy Kane)		
<b>Jim Neumann</b> (father-in-law of Brad Gehn's son)		
<b>Harley Hepner</b> (cousin of Sarah Hock)		
<b>Claris Anderson</b> (mother of Sarah Hock)		

**MILITARY**—We pray for those serving in our military and their families:

**Mandy & Richard Davila** (daughter & son-in-law of Dale & Linda Aper)  
**Luke & Nicole Thompson** (son & daughter-in-law of John & Kindra Thompson)  
**Ken Willeford** (husband of Alicia Willeford)  
**Tyler Hynes** (nephew of Mark Ague)  
**Karl Flynn** (son of Mr. & Mrs. Paul Flynn)  
**Zachary & Tiffany Gardner** (nephew & wife of Bob & Lois Esterlein)

## LUTHERANS FOR LIFE

“The Adoption Creed: ‘Not flesh of my flesh, nor bone of my bone, but still miraculously my own; never forget for a single minute, you didn't grow under my heart, but in it.’” – *A Life Quote from Lutherans For Life* •  
[www.lutheransforlife.org](http://www.lutheransforlife.org)



# “NACHO” ORDINARY FUNDRAISER

## Sunday, October 4<sup>th</sup>, 2020

(pick up will be 10:15am-Noon in Immanuel's cafeteria)

*LWML's Third Pick Up & Go mission project:*

## FIESTA PACKS

*We are selling Fiesta Packs to benefit  
Cristo Rey/Christ the King Lutheran Church*



**WILL GET YOU A STARTER KIT WITH PREPACKAGED  
CHIPS AND QUESO TO HAVE YOUR OWN FIESTA!**

*Also, each order will enter you into a drawing  
for a chance to win a fabulous gift basket!*

**PLEASE PLACE YOUR ORDERS NO LATER THAN  
SEPTEMBER 27, 2020**

**TO PLACE AN ORDER OR IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS,  
PLEASE CONTACT CARRIE WERKE at  
CARRIE.WERKE@GMAIL.COM**

Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost

September 20, 2020

Sermon Text: Isaiah 55:6-9 (Old Testament Reading)

Other Texts: Philippians 1:12-14, 19-30 (Epistle); Matthew 20:1-16 (Gospel)

### **“The Ways and Thoughts of God and Mankind”**

Dearest redeemed, grace, mercy, and peace be yours from God the Father through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.<sup>i</sup>

These words from the prophet Isaiah are fairly well known. At first hearing, they proclaim the truth of the mysteriousness of God’s thoughts and ways in contrast to that of mankind’s, *our own*, ways. Truly, they are beyond our comprehension at most times. While we can make observations and predictions in the realm of nature using God’s gift of reason under His dominion mandate,<sup>ii</sup> we know, or at least quickly realize, our limits. His overarching rule of the cosmos as a whole and this world in particular, His governance of the nations both great and small as well as the twists and turns of each individual’s life, even His ultimate control over evil, all part of Divine Providence, is often hidden to our senses and understanding, His reasoning and actions confusing, even seeming contradictory to our puny, earthbound, limited way of thinking.

This mysteriousness of God’s thoughts and ways in His ruling of His creation was referred to, in part, by St. Paul, “Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!”<sup>iii</sup> Certainly, this comparison of God’s thinking and actions to ours being as the heavens are higher than the earth is rather humbling. Not only are we completely dependent upon God for all things of body and soul, yes, our very existence, for “In him we live and move and have our being,”<sup>iv</sup> but we are also rather incompetent in understanding His working and doing.

So we must accept that we are in no position to question, much less judge, God’s ways either in the world or in our lives. As Paul reminds us, “who are you, O man, to answer back to God?”<sup>v</sup> We are but the creature, He the Creator. Yet, when that humility before God is created and present, we are then filled with joy and hope, for we know that we are in the loving hands of the almighty Creator who is our heavenly Father as well as those of the risen, ascended, and glorified Christ Jesus, who rules all things for the ultimate, eternal benefit of His people, making all things, even the worst, work for the good of those who love Him.<sup>vi</sup> Truly this a great comfort in the midst of the trials we face: God is in control, and through faith in Jesus, He is *our* God! But it is not only the mysteriousness of God’s thoughts and ways as compared to mankind’s that is proclaimed in this text. For hear what Isaiah has written right before those words about God’s ways being higher.

“Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near; let *the wicked* forsake *his way*, and *the unrighteous man* his *thoughts*; let him return to

the LORD, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.”<sup>vii</sup>

Here then it is the *holiness* of God’s thoughts and ways that are contrasted with mankind’s. Obviously this refers to the openly wicked and the unbeliever, which by the way, is often equivalent, but not always. For while the majority of unbelievers are up to their necks in vileness and filth (as we see around us in our rapidly declining society), not all are. For the God-given gifts of reason, the law written upon the heart, and a conscience to read that law can keep people’s external ways on a generally noble and virtuous path, as has been witnessed throughout time.<sup>viii</sup> But no one, because of our corrupted nature, is holy, and so they remain wicked and unrighteous in the heart, filled with lusts, coveting, and wrath on one side, and self-righteousness on the other, both of which, and any combination thereof, lead away from God to destruction, for the thoughts and ways of the Lord are holy, that is, pure, sinless.

And so we must seek the Lord. We must not be comfortable in this sin-filled world, but instead always remember that we are but pilgrims here and so separate from the citizens of the world who are content in it. For that is a definition of holy, *being separate from*, that is, separate in both thoughts and ways from those who are on the path of eternal condemnation. For while the invitation is to all, there is no place in the kingdom of heaven for those who refuse to turn from their wicked ways, who do not forsake the darkness of their hearts and minds, who are insulted by God’s offer to “abundantly pardon” them because they do not believe that they require such, being a good person already on their own. Thus when we are called to seek the Lord, we must never presume to come to Him on our own terms, whether that be defending our sins or proclaiming our own goodness. No. We must come to Him on *His* terms.

But what are His terms by which we are to seek Him? First, we must recognize that all of our zealous striving, our spiritual searching, our changing of our sinful ways, our most heartfelt prayers, all of these, of themselves, will *never* help us find Him. But does not the Lord call us to seek Him? Yes, He does. Does He not tell us to turn from sin? Again, yes, quite clearly. Should we not pray both genuinely and regularly? Of course, we should. The problem is not with those things, but with us. For our sins, truly, our sinful, corrupted nature, have separated us from God, a barrier that *we* cannot break down no matter how hard we try. For either we do not try at all, loving our sins. Or we try via our own works, our own changes, our own emotions, and so always fall short, for any “god” that can be reached by our own puny efforts is but an idol.

So yes, seek the Lord! But do such in recognition that He is, in fact, *seeking you*. The Lord said through the prophet Israel, “Behold, I, I myself, will search for my sheep and will seek them out.”<sup>ix</sup> And so He has, for when He comes in the person of His incarnate Son, Jesus, the Good Shepherd, He declares, “For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost”<sup>x</sup> and “You did not choose me, but I chose you.”<sup>xi</sup> Therefore, the Lord has revealed Himself, has made Himself present, known, and available so that He might be found. And where is that? In His Word! For just following today’s text, the Lord says through Isaiah,

“For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not

return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.”<sup>xii</sup>

Dear Christians, it is in the Word that God seeks us out and invites us to seek Him. Through His Word of Law, the Holy Spirit works in us, showing us our sin-hardened heart and its well-deserved punishments in time and eternity so that we would recognize our desperate state and so seek mercy. Through His Word of the Gospel the Holy Spirit shows the broken, repentant sinner the compassion of God in the person of the Servant of the Lord, the Good Shepherd, the Son of God and the Son of Man, Jesus Christ. It reveals Him living and dying as our substitute under the Law and its condemnation, breaking down the barrier between God and us by paying for our sins so that we seek and find His abundant pardon of all our sins.

Dear Christians, we hear a text like this, one that seems both so basic and, more, so “beginning,” and we assume it does not really apply to us since we have already found Him. And it is true that we have found Him for He has called us by the Gospel, claiming us as His own in Holy Baptism. But just as we have found Him, so can we lose Him. But unlike our finding Him, which was truly His seeking us out, our losing Him would be completely our own fault!

So let us continue to seek the Lord today, and truly the rest of our life here on earth. Let us continue to seek Him where He can be found, that is, where His called ministers preach His Word in its truth and purity and administer His Word-empowered Sacraments according to His institution. Let us continue to seek the Lord by hearing His Word in repentance and faith and, being abundantly pardoned of our sins for Jesus’ sake and empowered by the Spirit of the risen Lord, now do those things that He commands. Let us forsake the thoughts and ways of sin, strive to grow in holiness of life and love for God and others, and pray diligently for God’s blessing of strength to live as His child in thought, word and deed, so that finally we be brought into glory where all seeking will finally end, where His ways will no longer be so mysterious nor more holy than our own, for there we will be perfectly holy and see our Lord face to face.

Friends in Christ, the harshest judgment that God can pronounce in this life is not natural disasters, wars, or plagues, it is the withdrawing of His compassionate presence by the withdrawing of His Word. For without the Word, no amount of seeking can find Him and so only eternal condemnation remains. God grant that we never bring such wrath upon us by failing to seek Him now in His Word by hearing it, believing it, and living according to it. Instead, may we rejoice that the God whose thoughts and ways are not ours has done what is impossible for man, but not for Him. For, in this aspect, *He has made His thoughts ours*, by transforming our minds, giving us the mind of Christ.<sup>xiii</sup> And *He has made His way our way*, for His Son became one of us, that by His life, death, and resurrection He might be the way to heaven, the way that we are now on since He has sought us through His Word.<sup>xiv</sup>

May we always continue to seek Him there as well. Amen!

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<sup>i</sup> Isaiah 55:8-9. All quotes are from *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (ESV) unless otherwise noted.

<sup>ii</sup> Genesis 1:28.

<sup>iii</sup> Romans 11:33.

<sup>iv</sup> Acts 17:28.

<sup>v</sup> Romans 9:20.

<sup>vi</sup> John 10:28-29; Ephesians 1:22; Romans 8:28.

<sup>vii</sup> Isaiah 55:6-7 (*emphasis mine*).

<sup>viii</sup> See Romans 2:14-15.

<sup>ix</sup> Ezekiel 34:11.

<sup>x</sup> Luke 19:10.

<sup>xi</sup> John 15:16.

<sup>xii</sup> Isaiah 55:10-11.

<sup>xiii</sup> Romans 12:2; 1 Corinthians 2:16.

<sup>xiv</sup> John 14:5-6. Through faith, we do know the way, for we are connected to Him who is *the* way.