

The grace, mercy, and peace of Christ Jesus, our Lord and Saviour, be yours today. The title for today's sermon is "A better way", and is from the Old Testament reading, from Isaiah chapter 55. Let us pray...Amen.

How many of you like to hear the phrase "I know a better way...". Those 5 words are blunt and they can be difficult to hear when you are in the middle of a task, or in your life in general, mainly when you are pretty sure you know what you are doing. How we often hear them is "you are all wrong so stop and I'll show you the right way." For years, when I heard those words, "I know a better way...", it would make my skin crawl. The impetus of the comment was I am wrong and that the one speaking was smarter or better or more skilled than me. I hated hearing those words. I resented hearing them at school, from teachers or fellow students. I begrudged hearing them at work from my boss or co-workers. I especially despised hearing them from my parents.

The worst part was, often when I heard them...they...were...right,

I...was...in...the...wrong,...or...doing...something...wrong

and there was...a...better...way.

And so we hear today's Old Testament reading and God is equally blunt with His Words given to the children of Israel. God tells them boldly: "**For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. <sup>9</sup> For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.**"(Isaiah 55:8-9).

Here God is not comparing His thoughts and ways to Israel's thoughts and ways, as if they were on a sliding scale and equally as valid. No, instead God boldly tells them they are completely different. His are better, theirs are nothing. He is right and they are wrong!

The problem was, the nation of Israel was an adulterous nation who loved to fornicate with all kinds of false gods, false gods they were explicitly told to avoid at all costs. Despite God's warnings, they still chased after false gods like a dog in heat, searched out false gods to bow down to, and worshipping and fondling those things which cannot save.

As a result, God reveals through His Word that His judgment was coming. Idolatry, like adultery destroys relationships and the collateral damage is extensive. The wages of sin is death, and the nation of Israel for their adulterous rejection of God, was about to get slaughtered. God would allow the nation of Babylon to exact His righteous judgment for their fornication with false gods and their rejection of Him, the One true God. For their seeking out other gods and for all their idolatry, their daughters would be put in chains and dragged off into a land not their own. The scariest part is many, including the king, did not really care as long as it didn't affect them.

The nation of Israel searched out gods on top of hills and under rocks and most everywhere possible, but they failed to seek the One true God out in the one place He promised

to be. That would have been too easy. God told the people of Israel exactly where to find Him. Moses explained to the Israelites: **"But you shall seek the place that the LORD your God will choose out of all your tribes to put his name and make his habitation there. There you shall go, <sup>6</sup> and there you shall bring your burnt offerings and your sacrifices, your tithes and the contribution that you present, your vow offerings, your freewill offerings, and the firstborn of your herd and of your flock. <sup>7</sup> And there you shall eat before the LORD your God, and you shall rejoice, you and your households, in all that you undertake, in which the LORD your God has blessed you."**(Deuteronomy 12:5-7). Some 400 + years later God established the location for His temple in Jerusalem.

Now to be fair, the people of Israel did go to the Lord's temple in Jerusalem. They did know where it was, they did offer some sacrifices, as was the Law, but that is where their worship of Him ended. As Jesus said some 700 years later: **"This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; <sup>9</sup> in vain do they worship me, ..."**(Matthew 15:8-9a).

While they may have seemed like a decent and morally upstanding culture, they were spiritually dead. There was no faith, there was no trust in God, no confidence in His revealed Word, either written or prophesied, and there was no diligent searching or listening to God and His Word. They didn't care about what God said. They preferred not to hear His Word and instead sought out other pleasures and idols they could better control. Their sin broke the First Commandment: **"You shall have no other gods"** meaning: **"you shall fear, love, and trust in God above all things."** God Almighty, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the One who created all things, who redeemed them from Egypt, who brought them into the Promised Land and continued to sustain all things, was no longer considered important.

Here is where our sinful nature is also revealed. Our sinful nature, our Old Adam, does not fear, love, or trust in God because he wants to be a god for himself, deciding what is right for himself, and do what he feels right for himself, no matter what the Lord Almighty has said. As Adam's children we do not completely fear, love, or trust God and His Word, nor do we have it front and center in our lives. As Adam's offspring we enjoy exchanging the truth of God's Word for the poisonous venom dripping from the devil's forked tongue. We hate to admit the failure of our way and that our thoughts are not what they should be. As much as our sinful pride may get shattered, the truth is our way is not the best and we have seen the damage our sinful actions and thoughts have caused in our own lives and collaterally to others around us. Even when we feel our way is better than God's, God reminds us in His Word: **"All the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes, but the LORD weighs the spirit."**(Proverbs 16:2)

We know there has to be a better way.

So, God tells them, and us, in today's reading: **"Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near; <sup>7</sup> 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."**(Isaiah 55:6-7)

God is calling us to repent, to turn from the vain search for self-glory and return to Him. God calls us to seek, cling, and trust Him and His Word. God calls us to repentance for our sins

and to seek Him where He promised to be. While the temple in Jerusalem was destroyed, now we have something better: Jesus Christ.

God’s way is completely better than our way. His Word, His way, His grace, His mercy, His thoughts, His salvation is revealed in Christ Jesus His Son who took our sins, our unfaithfulness, our failings, our unbelief, our distrust of God and His Word and carried them all to the cross. There on a common Roman cross Jesus paid the full price with His own innocent and precious blood. There was no other way for God to pardon our iniquities, there was no other way to forgive all our sins. We did not have the means to fulfill the demands of the Law, as we do not have the currency to pay for our sins. But that is why Christ came: He came for you, He came for me, He came for each and every one of us sinners who ever lived and who ever will live, and He paid the full price for all our sins. For “**without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins**”(Hebrews 9:22), so Christ came and shed his blood for just that purpose. “**The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.**”(1 Timothy 1:15) Christ came and He is the better way, as He said in His own words, “**I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.**”(John 14:6).

As such, “God calls us to live by faith and not by sight (2 Cor. 5:7). His ways and thoughts are beyond the comprehension of us mortals. God settles accounts in such a strange way. While seek revenge to get even, Christ Jesus, despised and reviled in life and in death (Is 53:2-5), offers forgiveness and love. While we would prefer to hold grudges and withhold grace, God takes no pleasure in being vindictive and delights when the wicked repent and live (see Ezek. 18:23).

These Gospel gifts are fulfilled in the death and resurrection of Jesus, our Lord and Saviour. Peter states: “**This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it.**”(Acts 2:23-24) (Lessing, Isaiah 40-55, p.666) Christ’s death paid for our sins: Christ’s resurrection proclaims our pardon and forgiveness.

God freely gives the gifts of forgiveness and salvation earned by Christ in the one place He promises to be: His Word and Sacraments. This is God's way. God graciously does not give us what we deserve, for then we would all be rightfully condemned. All of us have sinned and deserve nothing but death, and all are redeemed—equally and unfairly—in the blood of Jesus Christ. And thank God that He is so unfair, because if He wasn’t, we would be lost and damned, getting everything we justly deserve. But thanks be to God for His merciful and gracious unfairness; a merciful, gracious unfairness that is embodied right here in the blood-stained corpse of God-in-the-flesh and hung on a cross to die for you. Here is God’s full wrath and vengeance against your evil thoughts and ways. Here is God’s mercy, grace, compassion, and love for you. Here is your Lord, your Savior, your pardon and forgiveness of sins—your Jesus Christ.

By His Word, God bridges the chasm between His ways and our ways, between His thoughts and our thoughts. God comforts us as He promises that “**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, <sup>11</sup> 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."**(Isaiah 55:10-11)

God's way uses those things despised and rejected by this world to do the most miraculous things. His preached and proclaimed Word God plants the seed of faith. His Word attached to the water in Baptism, crucified and buried us with Christ and also raises to new and eternal life in Him. God's Word attached to simple bread and wine gives us Christ's own crucified and resurrected body and blood, come down from heaven, for our forgiveness and to strengthen our faith and trust in God. God's thoughts and ways are revealed in Christ: the Word made flesh. This Word declares us forgiven, breathes eternal life into our mortal bodies, and gives us a foretaste of the eternal feast prepared for us in heaven.

Christ has come. He revealed where He will always be: in His Word and Sacraments. Christ is the better way. Thanks be to God! Amen.

\* This sermon belongs to Christ and His Church because it is taken from His Word. Please feel free to copy or use it accordingly. I expect people to copy my sermons otherwise I would not post them. I only ask that you quote accurately if you attribute anything to me. Should you decide to contact me, I would be very interested in knowing where you are. Please include the name of your city, province or state, and country when contacting me.