

"Finding the God Who Is Everywhere"
Isaiah 55:6-7

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Grace, mercy and peace to you in the Name of the LORD our God; that is, in the Name of the Father and of the † Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Dear Baptized,

God knows. Man knows that God knows and man knows that God is everywhere, so much so that He has access to our thoughts and knows each of them before a word is on our lips. This being so, why does man search for God, especially when He is everywhere? Why seek when God is so near that He is, at this moment, as much with you tomorrow and as much with you yesterday, with you now? Baffling is this God Who is outside of time and is not restricted by the days of man's life. Time and space do not confine the eternal Creator.

Still, man searches and perhaps the question is not so much "Where is God?" (for we know He is everywhere), but "How am I able to find a way to be and to abide in the Presence of the Holy, Almighty God?" What is the "open sesame" word that cracks the dreadful door allowing entry into presence where the awful One is? The answer of the world is to keep searching, or to keep doing good deeds, or to ascend by good thoughts, or to re-image God according to your likeness, or simply to forget about it and follow the advice of Job's wife – to curse God and die. But these, while they may satisfy on good days when man's bravado rules, they do not calm the soul in the long days of terror and tragedy, or during the never-ending nights of awful dreams. Nevertheless, the admonition is to keep searching.

The sermon text for today is two verses of the Old Testament Reading assigned to the Church for the 17th Sunday after the Holy Trinity. Please listen to those two verses under the theme of . . .

. . . "Finding the God Who Is Everywhere"

"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 mercy on him, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon."

Thus far the Word of the LORD our God.

So man (or woman or youth or child) emerges from a cave and stands on this earth's mountain and scans the world before him. And behold a great fire sending forth flame and smoke as the Twin Towers shuddered and fell following the terrorist attacks, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire an earthquake under the ocean that heaved the sea bottom, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. And after the earthquake a tsunami that roared ashore in rolling death, but the LORD was not in the killer waves. And after the tsunami a great and strong wind – a hurricane named

Katrina – rent the lands and breached the dikes in pieces, but the LORD was not in the hurricane. And after the hurricane a flood that drowned man and beast, and plagued those who survived, but the LORD was not in the flood or in the disease.

Where was God in all of this? And that is only on a global level. Ponder what this means to the individual. How is the tsunami that kills hundreds of thousands any more awful than the man who is dying from cancer, or the child who has been sold into slavery, or the mother driven to insanity because her daughter has been kidnapped? And people search for some meaning and sanity in all of this, but the LORD was not in the cancer or in the slavery or in the kidnapping. Still there is the desire to find the God who is everywhere. Where is He!?

The answer of the world is to keep searching, or to re-image God according to your likeness, or simply to forget about it. Curse God and die. But that is not what God would have. He asks, “Why will you die?” The answer of the Church is to search the Scriptures and to listen to the Word of God.

God the Holy Spirit writes through the Prophet Isaiah, “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 mercy on him, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.”

Notice the desire of God here. He desires repentance, which consists of two parts – namely, sorrow for sin and looking to the LORD for forgiveness. He desires to have mercy, which is to not give what each one deserves, and He wants to pardon, which is to free from all that which separates man from God, namely unbelief. And the LORD God wants this to take place now, today, because today is the day of grace and forgiveness and mercy and pardon. Where in the world could the people find this gracious God?

In Isaiah’s day, the LORD was found where He promised to be, not only in His holiness, righteousness and justice, but also in His grace, mercy and peace, namely; in that awfully good and dreadfully wonderful place called the Temple. Isaiah had experienced this and wrote of it:

“In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and His train filled the temple. Above Him stood the seraphim; each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another and said: ‘Holy, Holy, Holy is the LORD of Hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory.’ And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of Him Who called, and the house was filled with smoke. And I said: ‘Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of Hosts!’ Then flew one of the seraphim to me, having in his hand a burning coal which he had taken with tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth, and said: “Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin forgiven” (Isaiah 6:1-7).

Good for Isaiah and the congregation of his day! But alas, what about us? The Temple is gone. Where is the LORD? What has happened? Let’s go back a few yesterdays in time to discover where God is today and tomorrow.

One day, way back then, ordinary people were in an ordinary house when suddenly a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire, distributed and resting on each one of them, and they were

able to tell a message in foreign languages. And God the Holy Spirit Who is everywhere was with them in this mighty wind. Why? Because the Holy Ghost had been sent by Jesus.

Forty days earlier, there had been an earthquake as the belly of the earth could not hold the One inside. A still small voice spoke to a grieving, hurting woman who wept outside a cave of death. The voice said, "Mary," and God the Son Who is everywhere was with her in blossoming cemetery and shaken garden. Why? Because Jesus rose again from the dead and left the tomb and its stone behind.

Three days earlier, in the darkness of mid-day another earthquake shook the earth as hell was rocked and heaven opened. Jesus the Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity and also true man, born of the virgin Mary, died. The LORD, Who is everywhere, hung there on the cross, suspended between heaven and earth. And before that, Jesus had said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," and "It is finished."

Good for Mary and John and the congregation of that day! But alas, what about us? The Temple is gone. Jesus is risen and ascended. Where is the LORD? What has happened? Let's go back a few more yesterdays in time to discover where God is today and tomorrow.

Do you not remember that Jesus had promised that, "where two or three are gathered in My Name, there I am in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:20)? Do you not recall that Jesus gave His Word concerning the Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven that not only binds, but when met with faith in Him, bestows His forgiveness, "and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matthew 16:19)? Listen to His promise to be with you in the Sacrament of the Altar, the Lord's Supper . . . "Take and eat; this is My Body. Take and drink; this is My Blood – given and shed for you for the remission of sins." Do you not remember the risen Savior's promise, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age" (Matthew 28:19-20)?

Here, dearly beloved, you have found the God Who is everywhere. This is God's promise and faith trusts such Word of God. Luther writes:

"It is of utmost importance that we highly esteem, honor, and rely upon the holy sacraments, which contain nothing but God's words, promises, and signs. This means that we have no doubts about the sacraments or the things of which they are certain signs, for if we doubt these we lose everything. Christ says that it will happen to us as we believe. What will it profit you to assume and to believe that sin, death, and hell are overcome in Christ for others, but not to believe that your sin, your death, and your hell are also vanquished and wiped out and that you are thus redeemed? Under those circumstances the sacraments will be completely fruitless, since you do not believe the things which are indicated, given, and promised there to you. That is the vilest sin that can be committed, for God himself is looked upon as a liar in his Word, signs, and works, as one who speaks, shows, and promises something which he neither means nor intends to keep. Therefore we dare not trifle with the sacraments. Faith must be present for a firm reliance and cheerful venturing on such signs and promises of God. What sort of a God or Savior would he be who could not or would not save us from sin, death, and hell? Whatever the true God promises and effects must be something big.

(Martin Luther, Luther's Works, vol. 42, Devotional Writings)

So, no doubt in several places, it happened, that in a New Orleans' basement two or three gathered

together in the Name of the LORD as the winds of the hurricane bore down upon them. An then, as the flood waters rose, this little congregation ascended to the attic, still gathered together in the Name of the LORD. God was with them as promised. Did they make it out? God knows. Either way He was with them and they were His, being gathered in the presence of and forgiven of all their sins in the Name of the Father and of the † Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

“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 mercy on him, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.”

May the peace of God that surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, now and forever. Amen.