

9/21/2008

THE PRAYER FOR THE DAY

Lay Minister: The Lord be with you.

People: And also with you.

Lay Minister: Let us pray.

People: (Unison) Almighty God, as You have called us to work in Your vineyard so we pray that You would grant us strength to complete the work You call us to do and give to us the assurance of the eternal life that awaits us as the reward for Your faithful people, through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and rules with You and the same Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

THE OLD TESTAMENT LESSON Isaiah 55:6-9 *(Isaiah calls for all to seek the Lord.)*

6 Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near. 7 Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon.

8 "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD. 9 "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

THE EPISTLE LESSON Philippians 1:12-14, 19-30

(Paul tells the Philippians his suffering has served to advance the Gospel.)

12 Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. 13 As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. 14 Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly. . .

19 for I know that through your prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance. 20 I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.

21 For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. 22 If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! 23 I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; 24 but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body.

25 Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, 26 so that through my being with you again your joy in Christ Jesus will overflow on account of me. 27 Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel 28 without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved-- and that by God. 29 For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him, 30 since you are going

through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have.

THE GOSPEL LESSON

Matthew 20:1-16

(The vineyard owner seeks workers for his vineyard and rewards according to His grace.)

1 "For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire men to work in his vineyard. 2 He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard.

3 "About the third hour he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing. 4 He told them, 'You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.' 5 So they went.

"He went out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour and did the same thing.

6 About the eleventh hour he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, 'Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?' 7

"'Because no one has hired us,' they answered. "He said to them, 'You also go and work in my vineyard.' 8 "When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, 'Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.' 9 "The workers who were hired about the eleventh hour came and each received a denarius.

10 So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. 11 When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. 12 'These men who were hired last worked only one hour,' they said, 'and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.'

13 "But he answered one of them, 'Friend, I am not being unfair to you. Didn't you agree to work for a denarius? 14 Take your pay and go. I want to give the man who was hired last the same as I gave you. 15 Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?'

16 "So the last will be first, and the first will be last."

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Isaiah 55:6-9

6 Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near. 7 Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon.

8 "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD. 9 "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

INTRO - Last night I went home from Jamie's wedding and turned on my TV set. I watched a little of the ESPN Sports Center. I wanted to see how the team from Gainesville, FL, one of the towns where I grew up, how the Gators had done.

I like watching some TV, mainly sports, but, I can't explain to you how a TV works. Can you explain it? There are some, people of a mechanical or technical mind, who want to know what makes things work. There are some like me, they just want to make sure the TV does work, and they don't care so much, how. It is a mystery.

I. The Old Testament verse from today's readings tells us that God's ways are beyond our knowing.

A. Isaiah 55:8 and 9 say, **8 "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD. 9 "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.**

1. There are some ways that this is good. I don't want the God I worship to be on my level. I know that my ways and my thoughts are finite, and they are mistake filled. I know I NEED God to be wiser than I am.

2. However, there are some for whom the mystery of God is daunting. If God acts in ways I don't understand, and these ways aren't the way I would do things, that can trouble them. They want to know, to understand. Sometimes, people demand to know God's ways and thoughts.

B. In today's lesson God calls the people to seek Him, to come near to Him. **6 Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near.**

1. A couple of years ago one of my sons wanted to work on a problem with a snowmachine I used to have. I did not know much about the mechanics of the snowmachine, so I told my son and a friend to make sure they knew what they were doing. When they were done taking the snowmachine apart and putting it back together there was a bucket of left over parts.

I don't like being unable to understand what I'm doing, so I take it to a mechanic, and let him work on it.

2. For many the mystery, the unknown part of God can make it difficult to seek Him, to come to Him.

C. There is another point that makes coming to God difficult.

1. The Holy God calls sinful people to come to Him in repentance.

2. **6 Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near. 7 Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the LORD,**

3. There are ways that coming to God can be even more daunting than just that He is mysterious. God is holy, and we are sinful. Why would we want to go to someone who knows our sin?

II. What happens if you speed through a school zone and a policeman sees you? Will he say, "You should not have been speeding, and it's my job to give you a ticket or arrest you, but I'll be merciful and forgive you, though you were endangering the lives of children.?" No, he'll give you a ticket, the punishment for your offense. We know that natural order of things.

A. Now listen to God explain how and why His ways are higher and greater than our ways.

1. God says, **7 Let the wicked forsake his WAY and the evil man his THOUGHTS.**

2. In verses 8 and 9 God tells us about His ways and thoughts. The ways and thoughts of God are higher and different than ours. **8 "For my THOUGHTS are not your thoughts, neither are your WAYS my ways," declares the LORD. 9 "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my WAYS higher than your WAYS and my THOUGHTS than your THOUGHTS**

B. But verse 7 tells us how God's ways and thoughts are different. **7 Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the LORD, and he will have MERCY on him, and to our God, for he will freely PARDON.**

1. One of the great ways that God is different, that God's ways are higher, is that God is a God of mercy, according to verse 7, and that God pardons those who turn to Him in repentance and faith.

2. We give punishment, we expect punishment, and God shows mercy and pardons.

3. No wonder His ways and His thoughts are different and higher than ours.

III. It used to be that when my dog disobeyed me and I punished her, I noticed she did not want to come when I called. But, when I take time to spend with my dog and reward her, she comes when I call, and willingly does what I tell her to do. It seems she is more likely to come to love than to punishment.

A. People may, we may feel overwhelmed by the mystery of God, and it may seem difficult to come to a greater, Higher, righteous and holy Lord.

B. But listen again to verse 7. **7 Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon.**

1. God is different than we are because he treat us with love.

2. He forgives our sin and pardons our guilt in Jesus.

3. God continues to love us when we do not deserve it.

C. When we know the mysterious pardon and forgiveness of God we want to come when He calls.

1. In response to God's love we want to turn from our selfish, and self destructive ways.

2. We want to live for Him and serve Him.

CONCLUSION - Today again God calls and sends. He calls us to Him, to His love and forgiveness, especially in the Lord's Supper. **This is my blood of the covenant shed for you for the forgiveness of your sins.** And He sends us out to live in the mystery and power of His love.

Come to this mysterious Lord and receive His love and forgiveness. Come today. Come each day throughout your life. His ways are ways of pardon and forgiveness, and then go and live for Him and serve Him. Amen.

