

"Our Omnipotent God"

Text: Isaiah 55:6-11

Oh that I had a thousand voices to praise my God with thousand tongues
My heart, which in the Lord rejoices, would then proclaim in grateful songs
To all, wherever I might be, what great things God that done for me. (TLH 30)

Fellow Servants of our truly awesome, omnipotent (all-powerful) Creator-God:

Both our Christian faith and our God are under attack, and one would be hard-pressed to find anything more profoundly foolish. Jesus himself founded the Christian Church, and he promised that even **"the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."** ^{ESV}(Matthew 16:18) This is important for Christians to remember when the opposition seems so overwhelming and the very threads of civilized society seem to be unraveling before our eyes. In fact the only thing more foolish than the current war being waged against the Christian faith is the war against earth's Creator-God. I can think of no endeavor more certain to end in catastrophic failure. Don't be fooled. Nothing and no one can successfully resist the power of our omnipotent God.

And yet at times it seems like the forces of evil are winning, doesn't it? They aren't. Just as it is true that *"history is written by the winners,"* so it is also true that it is usually *the loudest voices that are heard*, and the loudest voices today all seem to be shouting that God is dead, and that the time of Christianity (including Christian morality) has passed. Repeating nonsense does not make it any more true or right. If the entire world were to shout in unison that the sun rises in the west and sets in the east, that wouldn't make it any less wrong or silly. If vast hordes all proclaim that man created God, that wouldn't make the idea any less ridiculous. But, again, it can *feel* that way, at least for a time – especially when the godless seem to own all the megaphones.

There is really nothing new in all of this. A defiant, vocal segment of *every* society has always rebelled against their Creator – has always stubbornly resisted and denied him – and they have all come to failure and ruin. Every single one, because man can never succeed when he fights against his God. So then what we are dealing with here really has more to do with feelings or emotion than it does with truth or fact, and this morning we seek therefore to address the *feelings* that the power of our God is fading with the *facts* that he has revealed to us in his Word.

The text that will instruct and comfort us this morning is found in the Book of Isaiah, the 55th Chapter:

^{ESV} **Isaiah 55:6-11** **"Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near; ⁷ 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. ⁸ For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. ⁹ For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. ¹⁰ 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, ¹¹ 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."**

These are the words of the one true God. In humble acknowledgement that these words from our God represent truth and light, so we pray, **"Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth."** Amen.

Just as art and history both need a certain distance or perspective to be grasped, the same is often true of God's power in our lives. We get so caught up in the little things that we lose the big picture. That's part of what we want to correct this morning.

Atheistic historians have long claimed that man created both the Christian faith and the concept of God. They claim to see an evolution of faith and man's perception of God over the centuries. God's interaction with man certainly progressed, but it also most certainly did not evolve – not in the sense of mutation or change at the hand of man. The Christian faith did not begin with the birth or death of Jesus Christ. It is the same religion that God established from eternity and revealed first to Adam and Eve. The only part that man played in the creation of the Christian faith is that we made the life and death of Jesus Christ *necessary* through our sinful disobedience and rebellion. In other words, we created only the problem, not the solution. This can help us to understand the position of the Godless, for if sin is denied, so is the need for a Savior from sin.

Historians believe that man created the Christian faith, in part, because they can see no record of anyone calling himself a Christian prior to about 50 AD. (Acts 11:26) The fact is Adam and Eve were Christians,

for they trusted in the promise of God to send a Savior – Christ Jesus. As was Abraham, the focal or divergent point of the three dominant world religions. The Jews claim him as the father of the Jewish nation and the Muslims claim him as the father of the Muslim nations, but Abraham was, above all, a Christian. He too placed his trust in God's promise that **"in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed."** (Genesis 22:18) The **"blessing"** that benefits **"all nations"** is – *and can only be* – Jesus Christ, the One who paid for the sins of all mankind.

Historians are also fooled by the seemingly sporadic pattern of God's revelation to or through man. In other words, since God does not talk to *everyone* (more specifically to them) they come to doubt that he really communicated with *anyone*. Again, they thus credit man with the creation of God - men like Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Mohammed, and Joseph Smith; men who, in their opinion, only *imagined* that they talked with God, and thus created "new and improved religions."

Some of the problems with this sort of view of the history of religions are obvious. Such a view obviously undermines what we have come to know and believe about our God. Other dangers might not be so obvious. It is that kind of danger that we examine this morning, in particular the idea that the Christian faith is outdated and impotent, having been superseded by "new and improved" beliefs, along with the myth that God is not living, active, and powerful in his dealings with us today. The idea that God is something less – much less – than we think he is.

For guidance, we turn again to these words from our text – powerful and revealing words that form the bedrock of our study: **"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. ⁹ For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."**

The basic message here is that, far from *creating* God, man cannot even comprehend God. We are not capable, since he is infinitely greater and unimaginably more complex. It is the worm trying to comprehend the fisherman, or the hammer the master builder. We cannot even *begin* to grasp that which is so much greater than ourselves. We are rather told by our God through the Psalmist: **"Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!"** (Psalm 46:10)

Is that the end of it then? Is that all there is to the Christian religion – "You can't understand God, so don't even try"? Are we all, in other words, supposed to be good agnostics, believing that there is a God, but that he

is an unknowable, unapproachable enigma? Obviously not. That same Psalmist concluded Psalm 46 with these words: **"The LORD of hosts is with us; The God of Jacob is our refuge."** The two statements have to be taken together, and when they are, we gain the profound sense of comfort and assurance that our God intended. We are indeed supposed to "let God be God," but we are also to take great comfort in the fact that this same God, who is wise and knowing beyond our ability to comprehend, is nonetheless living, active, and powerful among us even today.

How are we to understand or grasp this apparent contradiction or paradox? How does such truth help us in a practical way in our lives today? We get the fact that our God is so far above us that we could never fully comprehend or "wrap our minds" around him, yet how are we to understand him as **"with us"** even today? How can we accept that we cannot comprehend God, but still recognize and appreciate his power and presence among us?

Part of the challenge here is that we live in a time when God does not speak directly into the ear of his prophets. This ought not alarm us. There have been many such times down through history. In 1 Samuel 3:1 we read: **"And the word of the LORD was rare in those days; there was no widespread revelation."** Not long after, however, God began his ongoing dialog with the Prophet Samuel. We are again in an era when **"there is no widespread revelation"** but only in the sense of new and different revelation. He speaks today, but he does so in the firmly established words of our Bibles. Far from being a reason to doubt the existence or power of God, this should be for each of us a most comforting truth. Things are different now in that the Savior has been born and we have received the complete Bible as our infallible guide. Those who accept the idea of continuing revelation (through popes or prophets or councils) can never be sure what they are to believe from one day to the next. We have no such fear or uncertainty. God's timeless truth has been recorded perfectly, and preserved indefinitely.

The danger, however, is that we come to doubt God's *power* among us today because we can identify no obvious evidence of his presence among us. God *is* living, active, and powerfully working among us today, but he does so primarily through his holy Word. Our text puts it this way: **"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, ¹¹ 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." Again in the New Testament we have this assurance: **"For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account."** (Hebrews 4:12-13)

We hear such words, but I wonder how often we really take the time to contemplate what they mean. When we bring the Word of God – the law and the gospel – into the life of a human being, we are actually wielding the very power of God. The same God who created the universe has also promised to bring his unfathomable power to bear *through that word*. Ask yourself: *Do you believe that God can be trusted?* Because *God* is the one who has promised in our text to **"accomplish what he pleases"** through his Word. It is not our business to try to understand exactly what pleases our God in every instance, but we do know what his will is for our time of grace here on earth. His will is that we bring the power of his word into the lives of every single human being – *including our own*. In fact that's exactly how Jesus told us to spend our time of grace, isn't it – to share with the world everything that he taught us?

What then is the expected result of the working of this living, active, powerful word of God? While we cannot know the whole picture, we can know the greatest part – the creation and preservation of saving faith, together with the eternal life that results. Before you dismiss that with an *"Oh, that"* consider for a moment what could possibly have a more lasting impact on any human being? Eternity is forever. You and I have been entrusted with the power that can turn a human being from eternal death to eternal life. This is the very message of hope that Jesus Christ has given us, the power that he wants us to put to use. The power of that message is masked by its simplicity. God the Father, in Christ, has declared every single sinner to be not guilty of sin. He made this declaration not because he decided to overlook sin, but because he visited the punishment for all sin on one man, Jesus Christ, *his Son*. Think of that; our punishment (which we deserved) was piled instead upon God's beloved Son (who certainly deserved anything but). This same Prophet Isaiah put it this way: **"Come now, and let us reason together," Says the LORD, "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool."** (Isaiah 1:18) Our sins are forgiven. God has declared it to be so in Christ. Heaven in ours through faith alone in Jesus Christ. Just here is the greatest demonstration of God's power among us.

God today whispers neither in your ear nor mine. Yet the very Creator of heaven and earth is living, active, and powerful among us still today, working the unseen miracles of conversion and preservation every day. Rather than doubt either the existence or the power of God, thank him for the privilege of working in his service, and renew your appreciation for the power that he has placed at your disposal. God grant that we never fail to appreciate the honor that is ours and the living, active power of his Word, through which the Creator of heaven and earth still accomplishes his holy will today. Amen.

Scripture Readings

ESV **Romans 8:12-17** So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. ¹³ For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. ¹⁴ For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. ¹⁵ For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" ¹⁶ The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷ and if children, then heirs--heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

ESV **Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23** That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. ² And great crowds gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat down. And the whole crowd stood on the beach. ³ And he told them many things in parables, saying: "A sower went out to sow. ⁴ And as he sowed, some seeds fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them. ⁵ Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and immediately they sprang up, since they had no depth of soil, ⁶ but when the sun rose they were scorched. And since they had no root, they withered away. ⁷ Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. ⁸ Other seeds fell on good soil and produced grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. ⁹ He who has ears, let him hear." ¹⁸ ¶ "Hear then the parable of the sower: ¹⁹ When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the path. ²⁰ As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, ²¹ yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away. ²² As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. ²³ As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty."

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The Sixth Sunday after Pentecost – July 12, 2020

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 11 (Red Hymnal)

"Safely Through another Week"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

The First Lesson: (Romans 8:12-17) When the Word of God fails to produce the results that human beings expect, our natural inclination is to assume that the Word itself somehow lacks power or effectiveness. Nothing could be further from the truth. The problem, of course, is that human beings are not privy to all that goes into God's decision-making process. Do not doubt the power of God's Word.

Psalm 85 (Supplement page 40) (Brown Hymnal)

The Second Lesson: (Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23) Jesus himself here teaches us something about not only the power of our God and his Word, but about man's terrible power to reject and despise that Word. This lesson will be a great personal benefit if we read and apply it not generally but personally – identifying those things in our lives that serve to "choke out" God's Word in our hearts, and to distract us from the "one thing needful."

The Confession of Faith -

The Nicene Creed – page 5. (Brown Hymnal)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 417 (Stanzas 1-5) (Red Hymnal)

"How Can I Thank Thee, Lord"

The Sermon – Text: Isaiah 55:6-11 (Printed on the back page)

"Our Omnipotent God"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Prayers

The Pre-Communion Hymn – 305 (Stanzas 1 & 9) (Red Hymnal)

"Soul, Adorn Thyself with Gladness"

The Preparation for Holy Communion (Brown Hymnal page 17)

The Distribution

The Nunc Dimittis and Thanksgiving (Brown Hymnal page 20)

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 417 (Stanzas 6-7) (Red Hymnal)

"How Can I Thank Thee, Lord"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors worshipping with us this morning and invite you to join us each Sunday at this time. We are glad you are here!
To our Visitors seeking Holy Communion – In obedience to God's Word, we practice "Close Communion." This practice stresses both our concern for others, not wanting anyone to receive the sacrament to their harm (1 Cor. 11:27-30) and the importance of unity in confession and faith (1 Cor. 10:16-17). For this reason we ask that anyone who has not established this unity through membership in a CLC congregation please meet with the pastor to discuss this Scriptural doctrine before communing. This is a practice that we follow out of love and concern for you, and out of obedience to God's Word, not in judgment of anyone's Christian faith.

Attendance – Sunday (18) Average (35)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service w/communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour
	-11:30 a.m.	– Church Council Meeting
Next Sunday	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour

CLC News – Pastor Stefan Sonnenfeld is considering the calls to Redeemer of Bowdle and Zion of Ipswich. Pastor Rich Kanzenbach is considering the call to St Luke's of Lemmon. Prof. Steven Sippert is considering the call to Bethel of Morris. A summary of the recent synodical meetings in Eau Claire is available on the entry table, and full minutes are available at tinyurl.com/2020springcc

Church Council Meeting – The Church Council is scheduled to meet during the fellowship hour this morning. Please bring any questions or topics for discussion to the attention of a Council Member prior to the meeting.

ILC Planning Committee – Due in large part to the receipt of a large bequest, the current mortgage on the Academic Center at ILC has been paid in full, and a significant amount has, additionally, been deposited into the ILC Building Fund. The additional funds have been designated to be used for a future building project on the ILC campus. As a result, President Eichstadt has appointed an ILC Planning Committee to develop a design concept for a new gymnasium (and possibly a chapel) on the ILC campus. Design plans and preliminary cost estimates will be presented to the rescheduled 2021 CLC Convention next June. Pastor Roehl has been asked to serve on the Committee.