

"Appreciate Your 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 hath done for me. (TLH 30)

Fellow servants of our great Creator God: History, like art, must be viewed from the proper distance. Stand too close to an oil painting, for example, and it often looks odd and disjointed. Step back, and it all falls into place. The same tends to be true of history, where that necessary perspective is gained not through distance but time. To get history right generally requires the perspective that only the passage of a certain amount of time can supply.

The problem is that the passage of time, while necessary to gain perspective or recognize patterns, is no guarantee of accuracy. Even the broadest view of history can also create some very *wrong* impressions. The passage of time can lead to a false sense of recognizing a pattern that signifies nothing at all – like the rooster that comes to imagine that his daily crowing makes the sun rise. This is nowhere more true than in the area of religion. Here's an example of what that means. Some of those who trace human history back to the earliest recorded events claim to recognize a pattern in man's creation of God. (Yes, you read that right.) These "scholars" claim that man first created the idea of a god to bless them with such things as good weather, crops, and reproduction. Man then created multiple gods that supposedly controlled different aspects of life. It was the Jews, they claim, who first developed the idea of one God; and yet even they first worshipped other gods as inferior to their supreme God. Other religions, so the theory goes, have simply built on this monotheistic (one god) foundation of the Jews. Christianity basically just added the Virgin Mary and Jesus to the list of deities to be worshipped. Islam, which appeared six centuries after Christ, simply identified the last of the great prophets as Mohammed, adding the Koran as the last best revelation of God through his prophets. So also the Mormons claim their religion as the completion of the incomplete Christian religion, made finally complete with their prophet Joseph Smith and his Book of Mormon.

So what is the false or misleading impression that is identified by these historians? It is the idea that religion was not only created by man but that it has evolved along with man. Since they can identify a pattern in man's folly, they believe they have arrived at some legitimate conclusions concerning who or what God really is. To do that, however, that had to label the Bible as just another ignorant, superstitious creation of man. Yet the very existence of forgeries tends to prove, rather than disprove, the existence of an authentic original. The alternative would be like claiming that since there are many forgeries or reproductions of the Mona Lisa, that proves there never was an original. So also the existence of false religious writings (the Koran, the Book

of Mormon, etc.) in no way disprove the divine origin of the Bible. Yet that is exactly the conclusion that the godless have adopted. Because there are many false religions and false gods, that means there is no *true* religion and no *true* God. They throw the baby out with the bathwater and thereby deny not only the basic, saving tenets of Christianity; they incur the eternal wrath of the very God whose existence they deny.

Our text for this morning is intended for our comfort and strengthening as it counteracts man's arrogant denial of his own Creator, and instead calls us to better *Appreciate Our God*. We read from 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 God's words. In humble acknowledgement of that fact, so we pray, **"Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth."** Amen.

Just as art and history often require a certain distance to gain the proper perspective and understanding, 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.

God's interaction with man certainly progressed over the centuries, 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 to man already in the Garden of Eden. Already there he promised that the Seed or offspring of the woman (Christ Jesus) would ultimately crush the power of Satan. Man created Christianity only in the sense that he made the birth (incarnation) and death of Jesus Christ *necessary* through his disobedience to the laws of his God.

Historians cannot see such things, 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. Abraham, the focal or divergent point of the three dominant world religions, was a Christian. The Jews rightly claim him as the father of the Jewish nation, the Muslims rightly claim him as the father of the Muslim nations, but Abraham was, above all else, a Christian. He too placed his trust in God's promise that **"in his seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed."** (Genesis 22:18) The **"blessing"** that benefits all mankind 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 minds only *imagined* that they talked with God, and then went on to create the world's 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" religious beliefs. Today's cutting edge religious thought includes the idea that God is not living, active, and powerful in his dealings with mankind. If God exists at all he is, to them, something less – much less – than what human beings used to imagine.

With that we turn again to these words from our text – powerful and revealing words that set the stage for 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 simply cannot fully comprehend God. We are incapable of fully grasping our God since he is infinitely greater and unimaginably more complex and powerful than anything else in our existence. It is the worm trying to comprehend the fisherman, or the hammer the master builder. We just don't have a clue. Because of this, our instructions on how to regard our God were summed up by that same 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 powerful beyond our ability to comprehend, is nonetheless living, active, *and present* among us even today.

I suspect many of you have had life experiences that will help you grasp this, although you may not have recognized them as such. Have you ever come in contact with (interacted in some way with) a master in a particular field or craft – someone who just really knows their stuff? Assuming you have, how did you interact with that person? Did you assume you knew more, or did you seek to learn? Did you presume to give that person advice, or allow that person to inform you? Did you foolishly assume that when that person taught you some, you then knew all?

How much more then are we *to revere our God*, acknowledging that we can *learn from* him, but never teach or contradict him.

How is this true 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?

Man tends to doubt God's *power* among us today because they can perceive no evidence of his presence among us. God *is* living, active, and powerfully working among us even now, 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 the Word of God enters our lives – his law and gospel – we are actually experiencing the very power of God. The same God who created the universe has also promised to bring his unfathomable power to bear in our lives through his 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 repent, believe what he tells us, and finally enter his heaven. His will is accomplished when the power of his Word is brought to bear in the hearts and lives of every single human being – *including our own lives*.*

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 in Jesus Christ, together with the eternal life that results. Our text spelled it out for us: **"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."**

Before you dismiss these words with an *"Oh that."* consider for a moment what could have a more lasting impact on any human being? Eternity is forever, and our God has provided us with the means, the divine power, capable of turning a human being from eternal death to eternal life. This is the very message of hope that our God has given us, the power that he wants to work in the heart of every human soul. God the Father, in Christ, has declared every single sinner to be not guilty. He made this declaration not because he decided to overlook sin, but because he visited the punishment for all sin on one man, his Son Jesus Christ. The same Prophet Isaiah, through whom God himself gave us the words of our text, 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 because his Son, Christ Jesus, has been punished as our substitute. Believing this to be true, heaven is ours.

God today whispers neither in your ear nor mine. Yet the very Creator of heaven and earth is living, active, and powerful among us even today, working the unseen miracles of conversion and preservation every day. This we can know about our God, and it is enough. Thank him therefore, not only for bringing the power of his Word into your own life, but for the privilege of working in his service with that same power so that others may also be rescued. God grant that we never fail to appreciate not only the power of our God, but his incredible love for sinners. What an honor to know him, to be known by him, and to have at our disposal the living, active power that he himself has provided. 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."

ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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The Sixth Sunday after Pentecost – July 16, 2017

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 Old Testament Lesson: (Romans 8:12-17) There is great benefit for us to be reminded often of the honor and privilege that has been given to us in that we are now *children of God*. As such we have God's own invitation to come to him at any time and for any reason. He has promised not only to hear us, but to exercise his perfect, divine wisdom in answering our prayers. But be reminded also that discipleship carries challenges as well as privilege. So also in our first lesson we are warned to expect hardship, which cannot be avoided if we are to remain his children.

Psalm 2 (Supplement page 30) *(Brown Hymnal)* *(Read responsively)*

The New Testament 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" from our lives the faith that God himself has establish in our hearts. The Holy Spirit works through his Word not only to establish but to maintain saving faith.

The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed – page 15. *(Brown Hymnal)*

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 417 *(Stanzas 1-4)* *(Red Hymnal)*

"How Can I Thank Thee, Lord"

The Sermon – Text: Isaiah 55:6-11 *(Printed on the back of this bulletin)*

"Appreciate Your God"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Post-Sermon Hymn – 764 *(Brown Hymnal)*

"God of Grace, and God of Glory"

The Installation of Council Member Samuel Meyer

The Offering followed by the Prayers

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn - 417 *(Stanzas 5-7)* *(Red Hymnal)*

"How Can I Thank Thee, Lord"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with churches and missions throughout the United States, as well as Canada, India, and Africa. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again!

Attendance – Sunday (38) Ave (46)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-10:00 a.m.	– Sunday Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship/Coffee Time
Next Sunday	-10:00 a.m.	– Sunday Worship w/Communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship/Coffee Time

CLC News – Teacher Ross Kok has accepted the call to Holy Cross School of Phoenix. Pastor Mark Tiefel is considering the call to Immanuel of Mankato. Messiah of Eau Claire has called Teacher Katie Naumann.

Voters' Meeting Notes – Sam Meyer was elected to fill the unexpired term of Mark Redlin on the St Paul Church Council. John Jacobson, Jordan Peters, and Fallon Prellwitz (together with her minor children Kelsy and Madison) were dropped from membership. \$6,000 from the General Fund will be applied to our current mortgage. The voters also resolved to begin a special fund drive to retire our CLC mortgage in full by the end of the year. Regular progress reports on that effort will be reported to the congregation.

VBS – The dates for our Summer Vacation Bible School have been set for Friday and Saturday, August 18-19. A flier distribution is also being planned to precede the VBS sessions. More information will be forthcoming.

Partners In Ministry Program – The 2016 CLC Convention approved the Partners in Ministry Program which is designed to link active CLC called servants who have obligations to repay ILC Student Aid Fund loans with sponsors who agree to provide matching funds for payments on those loans. The donor and recipient would remain anonymous to each other. For more information please contact the ILC Business Manager, Jim Sandeen, [715-836-6622](tel:715-836-6622)/jimsandeen@gmail.com.

ILC Contractors and Volunteers – Immanuel College in Eau Claire is compiling a list of licensed and bonded CLC contractors to consult and/or bid on maintenance and construction projects at Immanuel. Please see the Pastor for more details. They are also looking for volunteers to clean the newly renovated Boys' Dorm during the first two weeks of August.