

"Think About It"

Text: Isaiah 55:1-9

"May the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you. ¹¹ To Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen." ¹ Peter 5:10-11

Dear Fellow Christians:

The French mathematician/philosopher/scientist Rene Descartes once said: *"If you would be a real seeker after truth, it is necessary that at least once in your life you doubt, as far as possible, all things."* That probably does not strike you, at first blush, as a particularly Christian thought. Maybe it ought to. Christians ought not fear human thought or reason. It is a gift from our God. Yet like all such gifts it must be controlled. Man will always find both good and bad uses for what God intended to be only good. Descartes, for example, struggled (apparently for some time) trying to rationally explain his own existence. He wrestled with the notion that life might just be something of a very realistic dream, and therefore not real at all. Dreams, after all, no matter how real they may appear, represent a fictitious "non-existence." I didn't really attempt to conduct a church service in my pajamas, and with no sermon prepared, but it sure seemed pretty real in my dream.

The problem then for Descartes was to come up with some logical evidence or proof that life itself is more than just a dream. What settled the question as far as he was concerned was the famous statement for which he is remembered: *"I doubt, therefore I think; I think, therefore I am."*

To all of this, you and I respond: *"Whatever."*

The point here is not that such thoughts or doubts are always wrong or always right. The point is that we need to acknowledge the very real dangers that lurk in the shadows of our own minds. Deep thoughts, in and of themselves, are not the problem. The problem comes when we try to take such journeys without a proper guide. That's when we wonder into places we shouldn't go and arrive at conclusions or beliefs that are every bit as "real" as pastors rambling sermonless in pajamas.

For the help and direction that is so critical for each of us, we turn again to that only sure and certain guide – God's Word. That portion of Holy Scripture that will instruct us this morning is found in the Book of Isaiah the Prophet, the 55th Chapter:

^{ESV} **Isaiah 55:1-9** *"Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. ² Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. ³ Incline your ear, and come to me; hear, that your soul may live; and I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David. ⁴ Behold, I made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander for the peoples. ⁵ Behold, you shall call a nation that you do not know, and a nation that did not know you shall run to you, because of the LORD your God, and of the Holy One of Israel, for he has glorified you. ⁶ "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."*

These are the wise and holy words of our God. As evidence that we trust these words implicitly – with our very souls – and desiring that our God would use these words to teach and strengthen us, so we pray: **"Sanctify us through your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth."** Amen.

One sometimes wonders if thought – or, more specifically, *deep* thought – is something of a vanishing commodity in our society. If so, it makes sense in a way. The busier we become, the less time we have for any sort of time consuming contemplation. We are also being trained, from little on, to operate at sound bite speed. Who wants to take the time to actually think something through when a talking head can save us all the work by summing it all up for us in just a few sentences – or better yet, a few mindless slogans? *"I believe in a woman's right to choose"* is much easier than actually thinking through the God-given rights of the unborn and the horrors of destroying a helpless human being. *"We've got to get guns out of the hands of criminals"* is much easier than figuring out *how* such things can be accomplished among those who, by definition, do not obey the laws of the society in which they live.

Now here is where things get a little weird, because while actually thinking a problem through seems to be a vanishing art among us, we nonetheless seem preoccupied with what *other people* think. I can understand that politicians treasure opinion polls because such polls teach them how to tell more appealing lies, but what about the rest of our society? Have we really become so lazy that we now rely on others to do our thinking for us? In the end, who really cares what a starlet thinks about US foreign policy in the Middle East? And why is the country eager to hear what a Kardashian thinks about anything at all?

The answer goes to the heart of one of our greatest weaknesses – a weakness that the devil understands full well and will certainly use against us: the desire to be accepted by those around us.

There is tremendous pressure on every single one of us to conform. It is the path of least resistance that we will all naturally follow – unless some other force of greater power directs us onto a different path. How else can you explain why so many young people have their views so radically altered when they leave the home and head off to college? There is a good reason why our young people very often find themselves in spiritual crisis when they attend public colleges and universities. There they are taught to follow the lead of Descartes. You remember his statement: *"If you would be a real seeker after truth, it is necessary that at least once in your life you doubt, as far as possible, all things."* So college-age men and women are taught to erase what they have been taught by parents, pastors, Sunday School teachers and the like, and are encouraged to test drive *and then buy into* their own personal "truth." Unfortunately, conformity will more often than not lead them to adopt the prevailing ideas of their peers and professors – and when you are attending a public university, that is just about the best recipe for spiritual disaster that I can imagine.

What this means to you young people is that you will always be tempted to think exactly what your friends think. Understand that that's just how you are wired as human beings. And the pressure to conform never really goes away as you grow older, although the fact that old men wear Bermuda shorts with black socks is an indication that the temptation to conform does seem to diminish over time. Or maybe it's just that we are trying to conform to all the other old men who do so.

So the bottom line for you and me, as far as our thoughts and opinions are concerned, is that they represent extremely powerful tools or influences in our lives, and the use of those tools can result in good or evil. This fact

ought to be very sobering. That it represents the way things really are ought to be beyond dispute.

Most of us here today are not in college, but that doesn't mean the danger has passed. We can still be shipwrecked by our personal thoughts and opinions. What are we going to do about it? Certainly refusing to doubt or question anything is not the answer. God himself told us to practice a certain amount of skepticism and doubt when he told us through the Apostle John: ***"Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world."***

For our answers we turn to our text for this morning, because while it is all well and good to ask questions and to reevaluate our own personal thoughts and positions, it is only God-pleasing and safe to do so when armed with God's Word. We need our God to guide us through the process. This so important because when it comes to the truth, you and I are in over our heads. There are so many different and seductive points of view out there that you and I, on our own, cannot possibly know with certainty that our opinions represent actual truth. Nor can we *remain* in that truth on our own once we've found it. For that we need that rare and unique wisdom of God.

Our text makes this clear to even those of us that can tend to be rather dim-witted and stubborn from time to time. You heard those key words in our text – you probably know them by heart: ***"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."***

What these words teach us is that we cannot be trusted to arrive at the truth on our own. The key is to allow God's Word to actually form our opinions and to guide and direct our thoughts.

The alternative is dire indeed. Our text therefore poses a question that we are supposed to ask of, and apply to, ourselves: ***"Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. ² Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy?"*** Apply these inspired words to manmade opinions. Those ideas regarding salvation and truth that have no divine origin are of no real value or benefit to anyone. Here we are taught that there *are* those things in life

that are worthless – despite their appearance of quality or significance. Our text continues: ***"Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. ³ Incline your ear, and come to me; hear, that your soul may live; and I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David."***

At this point you and I had better be interested. Whenever God's inspired writers talk about the life of the human soul, you and I surely ought to sit up and take notice. And just what is it that you and I are supposed to learn as truth concerning the human soul and whether it lives or dies? Our text answers 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."*** Mankind has always and will always seek after some "higher truth" to explain how sinners can make up for their many sins and thus "get right with the man upstairs." Every single search will fail *unless* God the Holy Spirit leads us to Jesus Christ. Jesus is that higher truth that surpasses human understanding. Trusting in the goodness of another (Jesus Christ) as the payment for your personal sins is the heart of divine truth; it is the gateway to everlasting life. While man naturally struggles to earn his own way, the higher thoughts of God himself teach us that trying to earn forgiveness with our works is worse than useless, but that Jesus Christ *has already* won God's pardon and forgiveness for every single sinner. And every single sin.

When the Apostle Paul was taught this truth (when he was brought to faith in Jesus as his Savior) Paul's good and natural reaction was to ***"count as trash"*** all of the worldly wisdom that he had accumulated for a lifetime, and to resolve to know ***"nothing but Jesus Christ and him crucified."*** Good enough for Paul, good enough for you and me. Surely there are others out there who think deeper and investigate more fully, but what a tremendous comfort to know that there are no other "doors of truth," no other "paths to a higher consciousness" and no wisdom that transcends the gospel of Christ crucified for sinners. That ***"higher way"*** of God himself has been revealed to us in the person and work of Jesus Christ. You have Christ; you lack nothing.

In the end, when you *Think About It*, it doesn't really matter what you think. Man's opinions will carry no weight in the court of divine justice on Judgment Day. What matters is only what your God has revealed to you, and therefore what you *believe*. God alone determines truth, and what that truth tells us is that God the Father has forgiven our sins for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord. You and I truly need nothing else. Amen.

Scripture Readings

ESV **Isaiah 35:3-8,10** Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. ⁴ Say to those who have an anxious heart, "Be strong; fear not! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. He will come and save you." ⁵ Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; ⁶ then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy. For waters break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert; ⁷ the burning sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water; in the haunt of jackals, where they lie down, the grass shall become reeds and rushes. ⁸ And a highway shall be there, and it shall be called the Way of Holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it. It shall belong to those who walk on the way; even if they are fools, they shall not go astray. ¹⁰ And the ransomed of the LORD shall return and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

ESV **James 5:7-11** Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains. ⁸ You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. ⁹ Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door. ¹⁰ As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. ¹¹ Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful.

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The Third Sunday in Advent – December 11, 2016

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 702 (Brown Hymnal)

"As Angels Joyed with One Accord"

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

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

The Old Testament Lesson: (Isaiah 35:3-8, 10) Our first lesson today can be read with the eyes of reason, or with the eyes of faith. The Jews read with eyes of reason and still today miss their true fulfillment. When you and I read these promises with the eyes of faith, we know that they stand fulfilled in Jesus Christ and in His New Covenant Church.

Psalm of the Day – Psalm 8 (Supplement page 27) (Brown Hymnal)

The New Testament Lesson: (James 5:7-11) James – the verbally inspired author of these words – is widely believed to have been the first head of the New Testament Church, which was first headquartered in Jerusalem. His message here still has perfect application to Christians living in 21st Century America as we patiently await our Lord's return. God grant us the patience and endurance that the Apostle James wished for the Christians of his day.

The Confession of Faith -

The Nicene Creed – page 5. (Brown Hymnal)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn –70 (Verses 1-2) (Red Hymnal)

"Hosanna to the Living Lord"

The Sermon – Text: Isaiah 55:1-9 (Printed on the back page)

"Think About It"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Offering followed by the Prayers

The Pre-Communion Hymn -755 (Verses 1-2, 4) (Brown Hymnal)

"What Is This Bread"

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 - 64 (Verses 1-3) (Red Hymnal)

"Jesus Thy Church with Longing Eyes"

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 an altar at which to commune** – Since we desire to follow the words of our Savior, we practice "Close Communion" – a practice that is not new to confessional Lutherans. This practice stresses both our concern for others, not wanting them 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 first 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.

Attendance - Sunday (39) Average (46)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	- 9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service w/ Holy Communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship and Coffee time
	-11:30 a.m.	– Choir Practice
	-11:45 a.m.	– Church Council Meeting
Wednesday	-5:45 p.m.	– Confirmation Class
	-7:00 p.m.	– Midweek Advent Service
Next Sunday	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School rehearsal (No BC)
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship Meal
	-11:45 p.m.	– Annual Voters' & WF Meetings

CLC News – Zion of Atlanta, GA has called Pastor Frank Gantt. Pastor Luke Bernthal of Valentine, NE has accepted the call to St. Stephen of Mountain View and Hayward, CA. Faith of St Louis has requested assignment of a 2017 seminary graduate.

Meetings – The Church Council is scheduled to meet during the fellowship time this morning. Both the Women's Fellowship and the Voters are scheduled to meet next Sunday. Please also remember the fellowship meal planned for next Sunday prior to the meetings.

Christmas Eve Rehearsal – Parents and children please note that next Sunday's regular Sunday School hour is reserved for Christmas Eve rehearsal. Adults please note that there will be no Sunday Bible Class next week.