

"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, if by "doubt" he means "question" or "examine." 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 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 seems real every time I dream it.

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: *"Eh. 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; when we attempt to walk through life without the sure footing of God's Word. That's when we stumble. That's how we wander into places we shouldn't go and arrive at conclusions or beliefs that are every bit as "real" as preachers 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 guide and 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."*

This is God's Word. We trust these words implicitly – with our very souls – and desiring that our God would use these words to teach and strengthen us again this day, so we pray: **"Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth."** Amen.

Don't you sometimes wonder if thought – or, more specifically, *deep* thought – is something of a vanishing commodity in our society? Deep thought takes time and effort. 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 someone else 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, don't 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 make their lies 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. That's exactly why so many young people have their views so radically altered when they leave 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 friends 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 imaginable.

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 completely goes away as you grow older, although the fact that old men wear dorky shorts with black socks is an indication that the temptation to conform obviously diminishes over time. Or maybe it's just that we are trying to conform to all the other old men who do so.

The reality is that human thought represents an extremely powerful tool and influence in our lives, and the use of that tool can result in good or evil. While human thought continues, the danger never ends. What are

we going to do about it? Certainly refusing to think or question 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."***

The key is to look to God's Word for our answers, 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 the 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 that comes only from our God.

Our text makes this as clear as humanly possible. 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. It is imperative that we allow God's Word to 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. Ideas regarding salvation and truth that have no divine origin are of no real value or benefit to anyone. There *are* things in life that are worthless – despite their appearance of substance 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 talks 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 transcends human wisdom. Trusting that Jesus Christ has paid for your personal sins is the height and 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, not only because we could never do that, but because Jesus Christ *has already* won God's pardon and forgiveness for every single sinner. And every single sin.

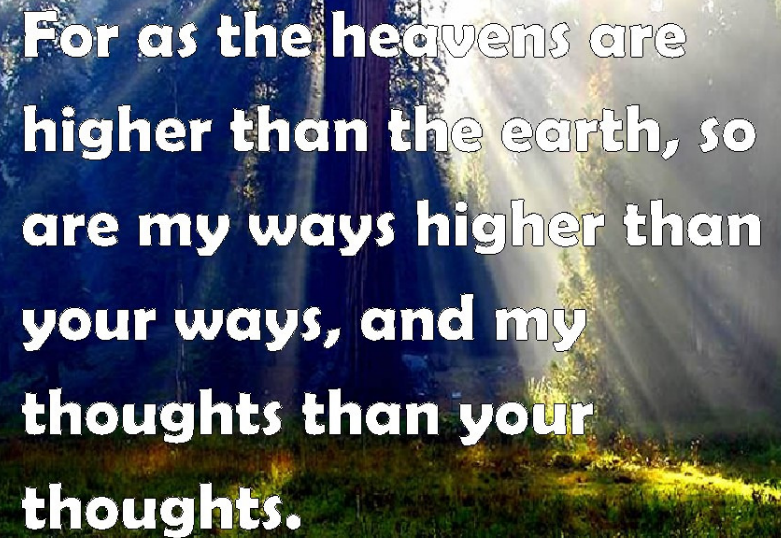
When the Apostle Paul was taught this truth (when he was brought to faith in Jesus as his Savior) Paul's good and natural reaction was to **"count as trash"** all of the worldly wisdom that he had accumulated for a lifetime, and **"to resolve to know nothing but Jesus Christ and him crucified."** Good enough for Paul, good enough for you and me. 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 actually do *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 the height of divine truth is that God the Father has forgiven our sins for the sake of Jesus Christ, is Son, our Lord. Believing that to be true, eternal life in heaven is yours. You and I truly need nothing more. Amen.

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.

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.



**For as the heavens are
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—Isaiah 55:9

ST PAUL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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The Third Sunday in Advent – December 11, 2022

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 68 (Red Hymnal)

"The Advent of Our King"

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

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

The OT 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.

The Psalm of the Day – Psalm 96 (Page 26)

The NT 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 – (Projected on screens)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 73 (Stanzas 1-3) (3rd Tune) (Red Hymnal)

"Lift Up Your Heads, Ye Mighty Gates"

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

"Think About It"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Prayers

The Pre-Communion Hymn – 312 (Stanzas 1-2) (Red Hymnal)

"Lord Jesus Christ, Thou Living 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 – 73 (Stanzas 4-5) (3rd Tune) (Red Hymnal)

"Lift Up Your Heads, Ye Mighty Gates"

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 (36) Average (35) Wednesday (19)

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 Meal
	-11:45 a.m.	– Annual Voters & WF Meetings
Wednesday	-5:45 p.m.	– Confirmation Class
	-7:00 p.m.	– Midweek Advent Service
Next Sunday	-9:00 a.m.	– Christmas Eve Rehearsal (No BC/SS)
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour

Church Council Notes – Five Council members plus the Pastor met on 12/4. At his request, James Strunk was transferred to Redeemer of Bowdle. A strong offering in November reduced our General Fund deficit to -\$334. The 2023 Budget was finalized for presentation to the Voters Assembly, as is the 2023 Usher/Cleaning list. Next Council meeting to follow the Annual Voters Meeting on 12/11.

Voting Membership Application – Dalton Loeb, Justus Naumann, and Jamison Strege have applied for voting membership at St Paul.

Meal and Meetings – All are invited to remain for the fellowship meal after the service this morning, followed by meetings of both the Women's Fellowship and Voting Assembly.

Advent Services – The last of our three midweek Advent services is this Wednesday at 7pm. Confirmation start time through Christmas is 5:45pm.

Christmas Eve Rehearsal – Christmas Eve rehearsal is scheduled for the Sunday School/Bible Class hour next Sunday.