

ISAIAH 55:6-9

RETURN TO THE LORD

While driving, if you're using a form of GPS you might occasionally hear these words, "Return to your route. Return to your route." If you take a wrong turn the GPS will tell you to get back on the right path. That's what our text from Isaiah does today. This isn't a text to those who have never been followers of God. It's not to those who have never believed in God Almighty. Instead, this is for believers, us believers who are continuously wandering off the right path of following God.

Oh, that looks nice over there. I want to check that out. Return to your route. What do you mean turn here, I want to turn over there. Return to your route. Now while sometimes your GPS is wrong, like the time it had me driving it circles in the States and after the third time around I stopped listening to it, listening to God is never wrong, and when we stop listening to God we need to return to God. Yes sometimes God's ways are going to be different from the ways that we think we should be going.

So, our text starts with telling us to "seek the Lord while He may be found". I pondered that, does that mean that there are times when God will not be found. It continues, "call upon Him while He is near". Does that mean that there are times when God is far away from us? Is our text telling us about a God who can be so far away that we cannot find Him?

Sadly, there is a possibility of us being so far away from God. In the book of Deuteronomy God said, "Then My anger will be kindled against them in that day, and I will forsake them and hide My face from them, and they will be devoured. And many evils and troubles will come upon them, so that they will say in that day, 'Have not these evils come upon us because our God is not among us?' And I will surely hide My face in that day because of all the evil that they have done, because they have turned to other gods" (v's 17-18).

Our text is telling us to return to God's ways, to His route, to His Law and Gospel. And yes it's addressing us as wicked people. If you take offense at being called wicked, and being told to return to the Lord, another way of translating that is to say "the one who does wrong". So, all that this is telling us is that when we do something wrong, that's not according to God's ways and thoughts we are to return to God's ways and thoughts. To return to a path, you had to have already been on that path. This text is calling you to come back to the right ways of God.

This text is not about judgment or punishment, but instead it's telling you that you'll receive compassion and abundant pardon when you return to the Lord. Too, often when we've done something wrong rather than admit to our wrongs we lie and try to cover up what we did, because we're afraid of the

punishment from the Law, or we're afraid of being yelled at by parents, or we're afraid our friends will get angry with us and reject us. We're afraid of the consequences.

The consequences of returning to the Lord are compassion and forgiveness. This text isn't about God being angry with us and hiding His face from us, but rather this text is about God making Himself available and accessible to us. God wants to be found by us and so He places Himself near to us. You may wonder where God is, where you can seek for the Lord and call upon His name.

This is a theme of the Bible, and I can give you endless examples of these instructions and places to find God, and so I'll give you a few of them so that you have no excuse for not seeking and finding God.

Hosea told the people, "Return, O Israel, to the LORD your God, for you have stumbled because of your iniquity. Take with you words and return to the LORD; say to Him, 'Take away all iniquity; accept what is good'" (Hosea 14:1-2a). You return to your God when you confess your sins to Him and look for His forgiveness. God won't look upon a sinner who is unrepentant. To be repentant is to turn away from our sins and to turn to God. So we begin each service with a confession of our sins and hearing God's forgiveness. You may grow tired of beginning each service that way, but we can only come into God's presence when we're forgiven, and only then can we expect that He'll hear us.

After the Israelites returned from exile in Babylon for seventy years God said, "you will call upon Me and come and pray to Me, and I will hear you. You will seek Me and find Me, when you seek Me with all your heart. I will be found by you, declares the LORD" (Jeremiah 29:12-14a). There God tells them that they will find Him in prayer that's made earnestly with all their heart. Do you earnestly pray to God at home? When I pray to God in church are you earnestly saying, "Hear our prayer", and "Amen." Or do you just mumble those words, and say amen to the fact that the long prayer is over with and you can sooner leave this place? Return to the Lord. You can find Him in prayer. As the Psalmist said, "Let everyone who is godly offer prayer to You at a time when You may be found" (32:6). And here is where God may be found.

When King David returned the Ark of the Covenant to the Tabernacle of the Lord he gave long instructions on what the people are to do in God's house and how they are to seek the Lord, and I'll let David speak some of those instructions to you for this house of God, and us who desire to seek the Lord.

"Oh give thanks to the LORD; call upon His name; make known His deeds among the peoples! Sing to Him, sing praises to Him; tell of all His wondrous works! Glory in His holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice! Seek the LORD and His strength; seek His presence continually!

Remember the wondrous works that He has done, His miracles and the judgments He uttered, O offspring of Israel His servant, children of Jacob, His chosen ones! He is the LORD our God; His judgments are in all the earth. Remember His covenant forever, the word that He commanded, for a thousand generations, the covenant that He made with Abraham, His sworn promise to Isaac, which He confirmed to Jacob as a statute, to Israel as an everlasting covenant” (1 Chronicles 16:8-17). Does that sound like us, like you? When you seek the Lord are you singing praises and telling others?

You seek and find the Lord in His Holy House the Church, through the hearing of His Word and through the study of His Word. That’s why I use so much of God’s Word in my sermons. You don’t come to church to hear my thoughts, but rather you come to hear God’s thoughts. You come to hear of God’s compassion, and specifically today you hear that God has placed Himself near to you so that He may be found by you.

Now, think of Jesus. He draws near to the woman at the well so that He may be found by her and her people. Sometimes it’s not in church that God reaches out to people, but rather in simple ordinary life so that they might discover Him. At the Listowel Fall fair they had a booth for the Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario. I visited their booth and church service when I was at the fair this year. After I left I visited Dairy Queen and in the bathroom I found one of the New Testaments that they were handing out at the fair. Honestly, at first I was disgusted that someone would toss it away there, but then I thought, someone else might see it and pick it up and read it. God may even be found in a Dairy Queen bathroom.

Sure the setting is nicer here in church, but the point is that you don’t have to go out seeking God in some sort of marvelous mountain top exciting experience. Those kinds of things don’t last. You’ll always find the Word of God here in the church, but if you don’t show up to church, God may find you somewhere else and try to lead you to return to Lord your God.

It may be at a time when you’re not enjoying yourself, but rather you’re suffering, and Jesus shows up to let you know that He understands your suffering and He has compassion on you. He experienced His own suffering on the cross for you. He knows pain. He knows humiliation. He knows rejection by His closest friends. You can talk to Him about what you’re struggling with.

Regardless of whatever situation we’re in God draws near to us and reminds us that He cares and that we can talk to Him. He reminds us that He is still in our lives when we have common everyday conversations over coffee, and He comes to us when He gets us to step outside of our everyday planned activities. God comes to us and says to us, ‘Talk to me, I’m still here for you, I still love you and care about you, return to Me, and I’ll forgive you. Amen.