

Sermon for the Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost

“And the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD, to minister to Him, to love the name of the LORD, to be His servants, everyone who keeps the Sabbath and does not profane it, and holds fast My covenant- these I will bring to my holy mountain...” (Isaiah 56:6-7).

In the Name of
Jesus. Amen.

“These I will bring to my holy mountain...”

This is a great promise for all “who join themselves to the Lord.” And I assume that is why you have come today. Certainly, that’s what the Pharisees were all about—joining themselves to the Lord - giving their “all” to unite themselves to Him - all their heart, all their soul, and all their might (Deu 6:5) and mind. Which is a good thing... In fact, the Pharisees were model citizens in the church. They were the focused, determined, and dedicated lay-leaders who strove to maintain order in the community and to uphold community in the church. For them, “joining themselves to the Lord” was all about living in obedience to God’s Word - all about keeping the commandments, toeing the line, ordering their lives in perfect conformity to His will:

“Keep justice?” - Absolutely!

“Do righteousness?”

(Isa 56:1) - Of course!

Serve the Lord? - Amen!

Love the Name of the

Lord? - You bet! I don't even allow it to pass over my lips, lest I utter it frivolously.

And above all, keep

the Sabbath? - O yes, to the letter of the Law - not so much as a kernel of wheat have I extracted on a Sabbath day.

Focused and determined, just and righteous, obedient to the letter of the Law, the Pharisees were joining themselves to the Lord... or so they thought. For in the verses leading up to our Gospel reading this morning, Jesus calls them "hypocrites..." (Mat 15:7). Jesus had just had another run-in with the Pharisees who demanded to know why He was so loosey-goosey with the rules: "Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders." It appears the disciples weren't washing their hands before eating (Mat 15:2)! And while this may sound like a trivial gripe, the Pharisees were actually accusing Jesus and His disciples of living and worshiping wrongly. As far as the Pharisees were concerned, Jesus and His followers were NOT "joining themselves to the Lord," because they were NOT living rightly - they were NOT worshiping rightly... They were putting unclean things into their mouths. To which Jesus basically responds, "Joining yourself to the Lord" is not about what you DO or what goes INTO your mouth, but about what you ARE and what comes OUT of your mouth. Because "joining yourself to the Lord" is about faith, not works.

It is about

confessing your sin and your need for a Savior. If you have no need for forgiveness -

if you are convinced
that you have “joined yourself to the Lord” by way of your own righteousness
according
to the law, then not only are you a hypocrite, but you are doomed to “fall into
the pit” (Matt 15:14). For where there is no faith, no repentance, then what
comes out of the mouth can be only evil all the time (Mat 15:10-20).

Well, with that, the
“true” followers of Jesus say, “Yeah, take that you losers” as *they* “join themselves
to the Lord” and continue their merry way, marching
along with a completely *different* set
of expectations - equally enthusiastic, equally wrong... Because for those who
have “left everything behind” and “joined themselves to the Lord” at His
invitation, there was now an expectation of glory - of a visible, marvelous
kingdom in this world with Jesus on the throne and each of them (in their own
minds) at His left hand or at His right. They had left everything and “joined
themselves to the Lord” and were convinced that Jesus and His church was all
about making the world a better place - throwing out the baddies, casting out
the demons -

piling up the bread for
a feast that never ends. “Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name”
(Luke 10:17)! Indeed, diseases were healed with a Word, the blind saw, the lame
walked...

Peter even walked on
the water. And now that Jesus had fed the 5,000, the sky was the limit.

These guys were on
their way to building a magnificent kingdom, and “with the help of the Lord,”
nothing
could stop them. Based on what they had *seen*
and *experienced*, their faith depended

largely on their circumstances... (which is why Good Friday went the way it did for them...).

And so, Jesus shows them what true faith looks like - what "joining yourself to the Lord" without any confidence in yourself like the Pharisees, and without trusting in your circumstances and expectations like the disciples, looks like.

It looks like a little loser, a Canaanite dog, a woman who was born the enemy of God bringing nothing with her but the ravages of sin and her fear, love, and trust in Jesus to save her and her daughter. She comes as a foreigner, an outcast, underserving of the gifts, let alone of a place in the kingdom. She comes with the open hands of a beggar and the prayer on her lips, "Lord, have mercy." Do you see what's going on here?

From our reading in Isaiah this morning, we are told that *"the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD... to love the name of the LORD, to be His servants, everyone who keeps the Sabbath and does not profane it, and holds fast My covenant- these I will bring to my holy mountain..."* Isaiah 56:6-7... So let's look at that: what service *does* this woman render to the Lord for all His benefits to her? She calls on the Name of the Lord. She pays her vows to the Lord in the presence of His people (LSB Offertory), confessing Him before His disciples and proclaiming, "Lord, Son of David... Lord... Lord" (Mat 15:22, 25, 27). She calls on the Name of the Lord to receive His salvation, what Luther calls the highest form of worship, clinging to the promises of God alone and looking to Him for help in every time of need.

Clearly, this woman

had heard the Word of promise - She had heard and believed the prophecy that the Son of David would come bringing His salvation. And now she confessed Jesus to be this "Son of David," joining herself in this way to her Lord, looking to Him for the fulfillment of His promise, praying, "Lord, Have mercy on me..."

As Isaiah writes, the
*foreigners who join themselves to the
Lord keep the Sabbath -*

they treasure the gifts.

They don't come out of a sense of obligation or to justify themselves before God, but as beggars to be given to by God. God has come for us and graciously located Himself among us in a way that can be seen, joining Himself to us in flesh and blood, that even the foreigners may join themselves to Him, falling before Him, taking hold of Him, receiving His gifts that set us free from our demons.

The woman joins
herself to the Lord, kneeling before Him, taking hold of Him, calling out to Him, "Lord, have mercy," knowing and trusting that the gifts are for her.

Indeed, "*the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord hold fast to His covenant.*" And so, despite what her reason and senses tell her, this woman holds fast to the promise and joins herself to Christ by faith. She cries, "Lord, have mercy" - And when her senses perceive only silence, she does not release the Lord but holds fast to the promise that He has come for *her*, that *all* nations would be blessed through Him, that He would crush the devil's head and save her daughter from her affliction. She cries out again by faith, "Lord, help me." And when her circumstances and senses scream out that she is being rejected by Jesus, or that the Lord is not answering her prayer,

faith knows better,

and she does not despair! She does not rely on her reason or senses but holds fast to the covenant. She holds fast to the promises, fearing, loving, and trusting in God alone.

And confessing Jesus

rightly a third time, she basically proclaims, “even the dogs - even the unclean - even the little, the lost, the weak, and the insignificant foreigner like me will receive from the abundance of Your table.” And so she does. By grace through faith, the love, the gifts, the mercy and blessing of Jesus Christ flow out for her and her daughter, setting them free from the demons, setting them free to new life, just like you and me.

For today, we, too, join

ourselves to the Lord. *We* who were

born the enemies of God, who bring nothing to the table but our demons and our need for rescue, come with the prayer on our lips,

“Lord, have mercy on

me, a sinner.” We bring nothing to the table, calling on the name of the Lord - not as Pharisees who trust in our good intentions for God’s blessings - not as those

who trust only in what we see and experience in our lives, but as the faithful who trust alone in the abundant gifts and promises of our Master who has come to give us His salvation. We come to Him who first comes to us, for in the end, it is God who has joined Himself to us, right? By entering into creation and uniting Himself to our flesh and blood, God in Christ *has* joined Himself to us - even to our sin, even to our death, even to the condemnation and wrath we have deserved. Jesus joined Himself to us on that cross so that we could be reconciled to God and joined to Him for life everlasting.

He joined Himself to us through Holy Baptism, that we could be united with Him in

a death like His, in a resurrection like His, in a new life like His (Rom 6:3-5).

And as we come before Him again today with *our* demons, *our* needs,

and *our* confident hope that His forgiveness and salvation are for us, we eat and drink His body and blood that joins us to Him and Him to us for our forgiveness, life and salvation. For *the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord... who love the name of the Lord... who keep the Sabbath and hold fast His covenant, He will bring to His holy mountain* (Isa 56:6-7).

In the Name of Jesus.
Amen.

Preached by Pastor Holowach

Sermon Texts: Isaiah 56:1,6-8; Matt 15:21-28.