

Sermon for the Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost

*“Listen to Me, you who pursue righteousness,
you who seek the LORD...” (Isa 51:1).*

In the Name of Jesus.

Amen.

These opening words from

our OT reading may sound harsh: “Listen to Me!” It sounds like the Law grabbing you yet again by the ears to hammer you with more of God’s demands. And yet, what

we find here is not stern Law but pure Gospel – Good News – the very evidence, in fact, of God’s love for you and His desire to be in communion – in community – in communication with you. For God, who is Himself a community of persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, actually experiences and expresses that community of Persons by communicating – by speaking and hearing and agreeing with one another. God SAYS, “let US make man in OUR image,” showing us that language and communication IS the stuff of community and communion in heaven – it

is part and parcel of God’s image. Which is why, when God creates us as an extension

of His love, He gives US language as well – He gives US His Word, that we might partake of communion with Him and with one another for life everlasting.

Of course, the

rejection of God’s Word – the refusal to hear and believe what He says, is a rejection of the very communion for which we were created. And by divorcing ourselves from God’s Word, we literally divorce ourselves from or union with God. What’s more, by divorcing ourselves from God, we divorce ourselves from the order He has knit into the very fabric of creation by which all things “live and move and have their being...” (Acts 17:28) – which is to say, we divorce

ourselves from life itself to go the way of chaos into death.

But God does not

desire the death of the wicked, but that the wicked would turn back to the life He gives (Eze 33:11) - back to the community and communion with Him for which we

were created. This is why He *continues* to speak to us by His Word, His LOVE that calls us back into communion with Him. In many and various ways, God spoke

to His people of old by the prophets (Heb 1:1)-

by Moses and David

and Isaiah - by the Law and the Psalms (Luke 24:44) to reveal His salvation and to gather us into His love - to pour out His forgiveness and to reconcile us to Himself. And today, we hear this gracious Word of love and promise and life and salvation that God speaks to all who are suffering chaos along the way to death - to all who long to be restored to communion with Him and the peace and comfort that He alone can give.

In our OT reading

today, God says, "Listen to Me, you who pursue righteousness - you who seek the LORD" (Isa 51:1) - you who long for order and peace in communion with God to be restored.

At the time Isaiah

spoke these Words, he was speaking to those in exile, to those who were living in the "waste places" and suffering at the hands of their enemy. God was speaking to the remnant of His people who had not yet lost faith, but who were in desperate need of rescue - which means, of course, that He is speaking to the likes of you and me today. For like Israel, we too are ALL God's people who have been delivered through the water, who have been reconciled to God by grace,

and yet who, because of the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh, now find ourselves continually in need of God's rescue. The buildings in our cities are burning. Neighbor has turned against neighbor in hatred - no matter *who* wins the upcoming presidential election, one side will rise up against the other. Free and open speech - the very stuff of communication - the very stuff,

that is to say, of community and communion, is all but dead. The world IS a wasteland - a pit of chaos and dysfunction that we cannot hope to repair on our own. To make matters worse, our old Adam is an idiot, continually sowing the seeds of divorce and death as we reject "community" to live only for ourselves, no matter how hard we may try to do otherwise.

And so, to the

Baptized, whether you were baptized through the Red Sea and gathered into the Land

of Canaan, or baptized at the font and gathered here today, God graciously speaks.

And He begins with a Word of advice: "Listen to Me!" For if it is the Lord you seek, you find Him with your ears.

And if it is His

righteousness and salvation that you desire, then it is by His Word that you receive

it.

"Listen to Me," says

the Lord - "Listen to Me, you who pursue righteousness, you who seek the Lord,"

(Isa 51:1) - You're in a world of hurt - I know. Like My children Israel, you also have turned from My Word, rejected My gifts, and brought ruin and chaos to your lives by way of your sin and your idolatry - your fear, love, and trust in yourselves and the kingdom you have sought to make for yourselves. But you are My children, and I love you. That is why I have promised you a Savior to crush your enemy (Gen 3:15), to rescue you from sin, to restore you to the paradise for which you were created. Look back to what has already revealed to you, and you

will see how I have remained faithful to My promise. Look, for example, to Abraham (Isa 51:2). "He was but one when I called him" (Isa 51:2) - an aging, pagan nobody without an heir to call his own. But I promised to bless Abraham and

to multiply him and make of him a great nation, and so I have done... Not only have I raised up from Abraham a mighty nation, but I have been faithful to bless ALL the nations of the earth through him, just as I promised (Gen 12:3). Indeed, My salvation HAS gone out - It is finished!

So “Give attention to Me,” says the Lord - “Give ear to Me, My nation: My righteousness draws near, My salvation HAS GONE OUT” (Isa 51:4-5) - for YOU! And yes, we have seen His glory - His love - His sacrifice on the cross that satisfied the debt for our sin, purchased our forgiveness, and now reconciles us to God. We have seen His resurrection that remains for us the sign of new life which is ours already in Christ. Through your Baptism, you have already been gathered back into that blessed communion with God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit - a communion not only promised to you by God through His Word, but now enacted for you by His Word made flesh who takes away your sins - who comes for you in His Body and Blood to fill you with gladness and to reassure you that you shall not succumb to the chaos, that you shall never be alone, and that He will remain with you until this all comes to pass.

And it shall come to pass: “For the heavens vanish like smoke, the earth will wear out like a garment, and they who dwell in it will die in like manner...” (Isa 51:6) - But not you who have turned from your sin to take your places in this Communion with God and with one another. For to you who receive and acknowledge Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the Living God, there is now no condemnation. Blessed are you who have heard this Word and believed. Blessed are you who have been reconciled to God and gathered as one to the feast in Christ crucified and risen. Blessed are you, for yours is the kingdom of heaven!

In the Name of
Jesus. Amen.

Preached by Pastor Holowach

Sermon Text: Isaiah 51:1-6