

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost - Year A

St. Paul's Lutheran Church

Isaiah 55:1-5

Psalm 145:8-9, 14-21

Romans 9:1-5

Matthew 14:13-21

08/06/2023

### **Gospel**

The Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew:

13Now when Jesus heard [about the beheading of John the Baptist], he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns. 14When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick. 15When it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a deserted place, and the hour is now late; send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves." 16Jesus said to them, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat." 17They replied, "We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish." 18And he said, "Bring them here to me." 19Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. 20And all ate and were filled; and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full. 21And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

The Gospel of Our Lord

## **Prayer**

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.

## **The Best**

Good Morning! How about a change of pace? Let's take a look at our first lesson from Isaiah, but we'll need St. Paul to get there. But first, a story: If you're a Lutheran, this word may sound strange and maybe just scary, but "testimony" is a common thing in other major denominations. Testimony is just a fancy way of saying that someone is sharing their faith story. The first time I heard someone "witness" or "testify" was in high school. I was at YoungLife camp in Rockbridge, VA, and I listened while 4 college students shared what brought them to God. What was so powerful was the immensity of what they overcame. They shared stories of various addictions, troubling family systems, or other health challenges. A common theme was that they all seemed to eventually hit rock bottom, where in their pain and suffering they finally opened their eyes and saw what God had been offering. Passages like our first one from Isaiah speak powerfully to those in this sort of place.

But what if your faith story was a little different? To be honest, sitting in that room with my friends I was... well... jealous. Here I was, a white man, from the USA, the son of an upper-middle class family with no major life challenges. I had grown up in the church, and so I had no "rock bottom" experience where I finally started listening to God. That's where St. Paul comes in! In Philippians he writes about a surprisingly different outlook. *"If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more: 5circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee;*

*6as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. 7Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ.”<sup>1</sup>*

Dr. Brian Peterson, a professor at seminary pointed out that Paul adopts the opposite perspective. St. Paul had everything going for him, his credentials were perfect, he was circumcised on the right day according to Jewish law, he was an Israelite, in fact he was descended from the priestly tribe of Benjamin. He was a pharisee, so well educated and obedient to all the rules. AND YET even with the “perfect” life, it wasn’t as good as it could be with Christ Jesus. Dr. Peterson made the point that it was as if Paul was eating the finest meal known to man and yet God was offering him something even better!

It’s to both of these perspectives that Isaiah speaks in our first reading. “Is life going great? Listen up, it could be better!” And at the same time, “Are things tough? Stop wasting your time on that which doesn’t satisfy. Come here instead!” But that doesn’t mean we hear the message the same way. This text was written for a group of Israelites who had maybe done well in exile, and who were now being called back home to Jerusalem to rebuild. One scholar points out that *“Isaiah’s invitation in verses 1 and 2 today is good news for the poor. It is not necessarily bad news for others, but it is a wake-up call to put down the gadgets that pull our attention away from God’s project of life in abundance for all. Those who strive, thrive, and adapt to Babylon’s consumerist culture should hear words of warning, reminding them that their return to Judah means putting back*

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<sup>1</sup> Philippians 3:4b-7 NRSV

*the iToys they got in Babylon in order to focus on much more important matters.”<sup>2</sup>*

Tough words, right? If you have nothing, good news! Come here and receive the best! But if you’ve been distracted by other stuff, the best that God is offering may look a little different. The challenge for many of us is to tear our focus away from the many distractions around us and instead see and listen to the wonder that God is offering us. Because if we do... man is it good! It’s so good that St. Paul calls all that stuff he had to brag about a loss. In fact, he goes on to call it rubbish, well, that’s how we translate it, but the word is a little stronger in the Greek. It’s crap, all that stuff before. Nothing compares to what God is offering!

*“1Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. 2Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. 3Incline your ear, and come to me; listen, so that you may live. I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David. 4See, I made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander for the peoples. 5See, you shall call nations that you do not know, and nations that do not know you shall run to you, because of the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has glorified you.”<sup>3</sup> Amen.*

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<sup>2</sup> Bartlett, David L., and Barbara B. Taylor. *Feasting on the Word. Year A, Volume 3*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008. p. 292.

<sup>3</sup> Isaiah 55:1-5 NRSV