

Isa. 55:6-9 17th Sunday after Pentecost Oct. 7, 1990

6Seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near; 7let the wicked forsake their way, and the unrighteous their thoughts; let them return to the Lord, that he may have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. 8For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord. 9For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

Some weeks ago I bought some boards at Builder's Square - 1 by 4's. Being new at this board buying business I just grabbed a bunch, not paying much attention. When I got home I made a discovery, one of the boards was severely bowed - warped. Somewhere along the way it had been left without support, so it sagged. Or as it dried it hardened into the wrong shape. At one time, had it been turned, or put on the bottom of the stack, this board might have been salvaged but now it is too late.

"Seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near; let the wicked abandon his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, that he may have mercy on him, and to our God for he will abundantly pardon."

The wood is still green - still pliable - the Lord is near. Now is the time to turn to him - now, before your life dries out, before you get hardened into the habits of not hearing God's word.

Good intentions are not enough. If my board could talk, he might tell us that he never intended to stay bent like that, but that the feeling of freedom was such a good feeling at first: Freedom to be shaped by the feelings of the moment - stay home on a Sunday morning - get that sleep - read the paper with that cup of coffee - just take it easy. Before long a life is bent in that direction, God and God's word are forgotten.

Good intentions are not enough. How many times we tell one another how we intended to read God's word regularly. How many times we tell ourselves it would be good to pray at a set time each day. How many times we tell ourselves that we will let our Lord be Lord of our life.

Good intentions are not enough. None of us ever intended to become a slave of the things in our lives. None of us ever intended to let a momentary hurt come between us and one we love. None of us ever intended to choose an ice cream sundae for myself over bread for my hungry neighbor.

Seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near; Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, let him return to our God for he will abundantly pardon.

It is tempting to hear these words and to say, "This has nothing to do with me. I am not wicked. I am not unrighteous. Isaiah must be talking to someone else. I'm not warped, I'm just a little bent."

Now that is true of all of us - compared to all of humanity, we are not wicked. Saddam Hussein ready to unleash poison gas, he's wicked. A Jeffery Lundgren, murdering a family, he's wicked. A father who beats his children is wicked.

But our God says, *"My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are my ways your ways, For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts higher than your thoughts."*

To my board, a little bow may not seem like much. But for my purposes that bend in the board means the board is of no use to me. So it is with our bends, our being warped. As we look at ourselves, our sin may not seem like much, but for God's purposes we must be pure and holy, able to live in every moment by his word.

"For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. ⁸But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us."

Our God is not willing to discard the warped boards. Though sinners deserve to be thrown on the trash heap, our God has given God's son to make us new. God's ways are not our ways, God's thoughts not as ours. Christ died for the people who have not been in the habit of putting him first in their lives. Christ died for the people who let all sorts of little distractions get in the way of praying to him and listening to his word. Christ died for people who worship idols made of wood and brick and stone, idols with fine paint jobs and five speed transmissions, idols that fit just right and make everyone notice. Christ died for the ungodly, that every warp might be straighten, and we might become lumber fit to be used for constructing the house of God - our bodies his temple. For God's ways are not our ways, God's thoughts are not our thoughts.

Seek the Lord, this day, while he may be found, call upon him, he is near. Abandon every way that is bent and crooked, every thought that is not aligned with God's word. Return to the Lord, for he will have mercy on you in Christ. Feast yourself with God's word that your thoughts will be as God's thoughts, your ways in accordance with God's ways. Amen.