

June 19, 2016  
Isaiah 65:1-9

Proper 7C  
Preserved in Grace

*Grace, mercy, and peace be yours from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, Amen.*

Problems, we all encounter them! Maybe it's math problems, maybe it's a problem that we have to answer in science or a social studies test. Maybe it's problems when it comes to life in general. Maybe on this Father's Day it's a father-child problem. What are the problems that you have in your life? Sometimes problems are hard to recognize though. On a Facebook post I asked the question: What are some problems that are hard to recognize. I got answers such as when you have food stuck in your beard. Indeed, when I had a goatee that can happen and did. On a more serious note, another problem that is hard to recognize is when to quit when there has been great commitment. In poker, I learned this term is called, Pot committed. In essence, someone playing poker has put too much into the pot to make it reasonable choice to fold, even against someone who could beat him in a showdown.

The question for you this morning is this: "What happens when we are unable to recognize a problem?" In our text from Isaiah 65 we hear this word: "*who say, 'Keep to yourself, do not come near to me, for I am too holy for you.' These are a smoke in my nostrils, a fire that burns all the day.*" Really the person saying "I am too holy for you" is fully enmeshed into idolatry...as Pastor Lessing say in his commentary, "idolatry of the most vile sort that promotes himself as a holy person of the highest order." This idolatry is a spiritual blindness. We cannot see. It prevents us from seeing our biggest problem. As Pastor Lessing says in the commentary, "The root of the human problem is that we are unable to recognize we have a problem." When we see ourselves as holier than thou, we are spiritually blind. We can see the problems in everyone else at this point, but the hardest problem to recognize is what is inside of us, our own sins, moral shortcomings, our failures. Jesus even says this in His Sermon on the Mount: <sup>3</sup>*Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?* <sup>4</sup>*Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye?* <sup>5</sup>*You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.* <sup>1</sup>

As you continue to look at the speck, as you continue to see yourself as holier than thou, you become like the apostates, the ones who dissent from their God. As you run further and further from God you "revel in what Yahweh declared unclean: the dead, the demonic, and unclean food." Really what is happening in your life is that you are trying to turn what is evil into something good. That's what apostates, those who are really unbelievers did. In our text, the people were eating pork, consulting the dead, and sacrificing to foreign gods who were worshiped in gardens. They were engaging in occult practices. They were in open denial to God.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version.* (2001). (Mt 7:3–5). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

What are the things that cause you to become holier than thou? Is it the vast amount of land you might own? Is it how you raise your children or how well they behave? Dads, is it how well your children perform in athletics? Is it your wealth? Is it the fact that you've been a member here all your life or for a very long time? There are many things that we do that make us believe we are holier than thou. Perhaps we're not doing as the apostates did and making evil into good...but yet we do, our sins that we do, make us feel good. Perhaps you are joining in with the rest of society and calling evil good, calling the blend of genders good and pleasing. It may not be the occult practices but it's your ability to talk about other people. It may not be the eating of pork (even though God declared all foods clean), but it might be eating too much (gluttony) or too little. There are things that we do individually that cause us to believe that we are holier than thou and that is smoke to God's nostrils. Really it's an irritation to him and it causes him to turn away from them. It causes him to turn away from us!

You can relate, when smoke from a fire is in your face...you turn away from it. That's what God is doing to the apostates, to those dissenting from God. Sin causes God to turn away his face.

Yet, God desires to be found by those who did not seek him. He is not going to destroy everyone. This text from Isaiah 65 comes after a lengthy lament from Isaiah asking God, "how long is your face going to be turned from us? How long will you keep silent and afflict us so terribly?" Yahweh responds by saying, *"I was ready to be sought by those who did not ask for me, I was ready to be found by those who did not seek me."* Yahweh always initiates the relationship, He says, "Here I am, Here I am." Yahweh God is seeking to serve His people. There is more here, Pastor Lessing comments, "Yahweh is willing---even determined---to be found by those who do not seek him." We see this in Luke 14 <sup>21</sup> *So the servant came and reported these things to his master. Then the master of the house became angry and said to his servant, 'Go out quickly to the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in the poor and crippled and blind and lame.'* <sup>22</sup> *And the servant said, 'Sir, what you commanded has been done, and still there is room.'* <sup>23</sup> *And the master said to the servant, 'Go out to the highways and hedges and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled.'*<sup>2</sup> This is remarkable grace. For Abraham, Moses, and even Isaiah were not looking for Yahweh God. As St. John writes in his first letter, *"We love, because He first loved us."*

That's his remarkable grace for you! That's what he does! He even stretches out his hands for a rebellious people. We hear this in our text: *"I spread out my hands all the day to a rebellious people, who walk in a way that is not good, following their own devices."* Indeed this is our God, the one who loves all people and does not desire the death of a sinner. Our Yahweh God did spread out His hands through the person of Jesus Christ. He spread out His hands on the cross, where He showed how much He loves you, you who are a rebellious people. You even see how great His love is to the thief on the cross who repented and said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Jesus responded to him, with His arms outstretched.

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<sup>2</sup> *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version.* (2001). (Lk 14:21–23). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

“Today, you will be with me in paradise.” The thief on the cross was an outsider and Jesus found Him. Christ first loved the thief, when the thief “found Jesus”.

The apostates (Israelites, the insiders) in our text fell away from grace. Jesus went to the outsiders as we heard in the verses from Luke 14. You are one of those outsiders. You were found by Jesus and He preserves you in grace.

You are found because that is the way of His divine grace. Yes, you may be caught up in sin. But when you repent that sin is forgiven “In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” You are found in Christ. As He finds you in Christ, you join the long list of believers that are found in Christ and now find Christ because of that. You join the likes of Abraham, Moses, Isaiah, David, the 13 apostles, which include Matthias and Paul. You join the likes of Zacchaeus, an outsider, who was found in Christ.

You are found in Christ and preserved in His grace because of those outstretched hands on the cross. And those hands hold you in their palms, they preserve you in grace. They preserve you in the grace that was poured out on you as hands poured water over your head and you were brought into the family of God. Just as little Jonah was washed in the waters of Holy Baptism today. The hands of God wash you clean. And these hands are hands of love. They are hands of a loving Father. They are hands who hold you close when times are rough. They aren’t just ordinary hands either. These hands created the heavens and the earth...they are going to recreate Zion. He has engraved your name on the palm of his hand. His hands were nailed to cross. His hands still to this day in his Resurrection glory bear the marks of those nails. These hands do works of love and they hold you in His grace and in His love.

And those problems that you have, Christ takes them, because He finds you. He takes the problems of your sin and self-righteousness unto Himself and dies for them. He takes the problems of your holier than thou attitude and dies for them. He not just dies, but He rises for you. He rises to give you life. He does all this for you since He loves you and preserves you in His grace.

\*\*Listen to the sermon to hear the ending that is not included in the written format.

In Jesus Name. Amen.

*Now may the peace of God which passes all human understanding, guard your hearts and your minds and keep them focused in Christ Jesus, our Lord and Savior. Amen.*

\*Sermon will be preached on June 19, 2016 at Trinity and St. Paul Lutheran Churches, Fisher and Euclid, MN