

**Return Unto The Lord**  
Isaiah 55:6-7, Trinity Sunday XXIV  
November 26, 2006

Beloved of the Lord....When I was a child, my father always liked to play little tricks on us, or amaze us with things we did not understand. Being gifted as a teacher, he was always showing and teaching us one thing or another about the world around us. I remember one time when our family was gathered together in the kitchen and he had placed some sort of white cardboard upright on an easel. He placed a small metal object on this white cardboard, and suddenly this metal object began moving all around the cardboard as if it was possessed! We couldn't understand why it didn't drop to the ground or how it moved. My brother, sister, and I were truly amazed and in awe of how dad had done such a thing!

What my father had done was really quite simple. The dark object on the white cardboard was nothing more than a magnet. On the other side of the cardboard dad held another hidden magnet which he moved all over the place with his hand behind the cardboard. I can't remember how long he kept us mystified by this trick, but eventually he taught us the properties of a magnet.

A magnet has a positive and negative field. If you have two magnets, the positive and negative will attract one another. They will cling to one another with surprising force. But if you try to put two positive ends together, they will repel one another with surprising force.

God and man are like two of these opposing magnets. Man opposes God every day by way of sin and impenitence. Likewise God is angry with man because man is a sinner. Today we will look at these two opposing forces, God and man, and see how it is God's desire that man repent of his wickedness and be saved.

I. Repent now, while God's Word is near.....tomorrow may be too late. Let us first begin by understanding that there is no such thing as a small or little sin in God's eyes. What we might consider to be a small sin, is never a small sin in God's judgment. In fact there is nothing in the Bible to indicate that some sins are worse than others. Just think about Adam and Eve and that one "little" sin they committed. That one little sin ruined everything! That one "little" sin turned all of their children into murders, adulterers, rapists, drunkards, thieves, Sodomites, and blasphemers. That one "little" sin so entirely corrupted their bodies, that there was death in their bones. That one "little" sin made them despisers of the true God, the very God who created them and gave them the goodness of Paradise. Worst of all, that one "little" sin brought down upon them all of God's hot anger. If God had not given them the promise of deliverance through the seed of the woman, they would've been lost eternally. Therefore when we look upon the sins of our life, may we never consider any of our sins to be little, or small, or harmless.

That first "little" sin of Adam and Eve was hardly harmless. Neither are our sins harmless.

The Bible teaches that our daily sins merit only God's wrath and anger. We have corrupted our own selves and are naturally opposed to God with all our strength. Like that little negative magnet, we cannot stand to be close or near to God. But it is our own fault. When man committed that first sin in the Garden of Eden, man was saying to God, "Dear God I will not be friends with you anymore, but I choose to be friends with the devil. I defy you God, and all you stand for. The devil is now my friend, and you are now my enemy." You can see then why God hates sin, and those who sin against Him. God hates sin and the sinner. Psalm 5 says, God "hates all workers of iniquity....[God] shall destroy them that speak lies: the LORD will abhor the bloody and deceitful man." God cannot be God, unless God hate sin and those who sin. God cannot be God, unless God hates all that is evil. "Our God is a consuming fire."

That God, that consuming fire, will return one day in Judgment. When Judgment Day comes, God will catch many off guard. Many will be living in sin. Many will be enjoying the pleasures of sin, as if God will never come and judge. But in that moment, in the twinkling of the eye, it will all be over. God will say "Enough is enough". And then He will judge all men. Like Felix in our Epistle Reading today, there will be trembling and great fear when Christ returns. Judgment Day is described in the book of Revelation this way (6:14), "And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?"

God tells us of this dreadful day in order for us to repent of our sins. That is what our lesson today is all about. God says, "Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near." This means repent before it is too late. We must stop looking at our own life with "rose colored" glasses. We must begin seeing the evil we have done. Without repentance and faith in Christ, we are all dead men walking. If we deny our sin, God will likewise deny us a place in heaven. "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." God's will then is that we repent, for He says this straightly in the Bible. "As I live, as I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked would turn from his way and live." This is God's will for us. He doesn't want us to die in our sin, but He wants us to repent and turn to Him in faith.

II. Turn to the Lord is faith. His mercy will abundantly pardon. But how is it that we repent? How do we seek the Lord while He may be found? How do we call upon Him while He is near? Here we must stop looking within for answers. Here we must look away from our own sinful heart, and we must look upon the heart of God. For the heart of God was changed from wrath toward man, into love for man. God's angry heart was appeased and satisfied by the death of His only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ the Lord! But how did this happen? The Bible says, "God so loved the world." God was moved by a special kind of love which we call "grace". God's grace is a special love, because it is a love we did not deserve. God then was moved by His own mercy, by His own grace, to send and sacrifice His own Son for our salvation. Now that God's anger is removed, He says to us, "I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end." Through Jesus, God is now reconciled with man.

The problem is that man is not reconciled to God. Picture now two enemies which have their backs toward one another. Their arms are folded and crossed. Their hearts are filled with anger toward one another. God's anger toward man is just. Man's anger toward God is unjust. God then speaks His Word to that stubborn and sinful man, and God rightly promises to punish that man for all of his sins. God says, "I the Lord Thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate Me." God threatens to punish man with eternal death and torment. God means every word He says. At this point any sane man begins to tremble. Man's knows all of what God says is true. God's Word is like a sledgehammer that crushes the proud heart of man.

But our picture of these two enemies now changes. Because of the work of Christ on the cross, God now in His heart has forgiven the sins of all men. Through Christ God's heart is now changed. God turns around, unfolds His arms, and now beckons and invites this man to be His friend. Through Christ there is "peace on earth, good will toward men." In all sincerity God now speaks the Gospel Word to man saying, "My Son has paid for all your sins on the cross. I am now reconciled perfectly with you. In My heart I have forgiven you. We are friends." This is God's Gospel message of grace given to all mankind. It is a true message of peace. For now that God has already reconciled Himself to you, all that remains is for you to be reconciled to Him. The Bible says, "Be ye reconciled to God. For he hath made him *to be* sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." 2 Cor. 5:21

God means this Gospel message with all His heart. Jesus says, "Come unto Me all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest." His message that you are forgiven of all your sins is true and sincere, regardless of whether you believe it or not. But God does want you to

believe it. To believe is to turn to Him in faith and love, for He has already loved us.

The Gospel Word which Christ speaks to us is God's Means of Grace. These Means of Grace cause our hearts to be turned toward God. This Gospel Word goes out to all the world like a wedding invitation in the mail. Some men open up their mail boxes, read it, and throw it away. They have no interest in attending the great wedding of God's own Son. They do not receive the message in faith. They do not believe. And so when we wonder why some are saved and not others, some are not saved because they don't believe the invitation from God. They cannot nor will not believe that even now, God is reconciled to them by the death of His Son. Some then are lost not because Christ didn't die for them (He died for all), but they are lost because they didn't believe Christ died for them. Though God's Word is sincere, some resist God's Word and refuse to be saved.

On the other hand, there are some who read that wedding invitation and they joyfully believe it. God's Spirit teaches their heart by the Gospel Word, that the invitation is indeed true and real. Such are the believers, who joyfully receive God's grace with thanksgiving! "These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. These were redeemed from among men, *being* the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb." Though all believers first enter life as unbelievers, their arms stubbornly crossed and their backs toward God, God's Gospel invitation turns them around and they believe. Isaiah speaks of these believers when He says in our text, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." It is the abundant pardon from God that moves the heart to turn to the Lord in faith. Some then go to heaven, not because they turned themselves, but because God turned them toward Himself by the Word! The true and sincere Gospel invitation turns and changes the heart of man from anger into love toward God.

Beloved of the Lord, faith is nothing more than trust in the forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ. He is your Savior, your Redeemer, your Deliverer, and above all your friend. Do not resist His Spirit, but receive with meekness His Gospel Word which is able to save your soul. God draws us to Himself by the Gospel Word, until finally we are at peace with Him! God be praised for His mercy! Therefore let us depart from our evil ways, and return unto the Lord in faith. He will have mercy upon us, and He will abundantly pardon. Amen.