



## **Pentecost 11**

**August 24, 2025**

**St. Timothy Lutheran Church, Portland, OR**

**THE LESSONS: Isaiah 58:9b-14; Psalm 103:1-8; Hebrews 12:18-29; Luke 13:10-17**

**THE SERMON: "Glorious Things of God Are Spoken... at St. Tim's"**

**Grace and Peace to you in the NAME of GOD: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Most people realize that laws rules are made to be fair and just. But, I think this old joke about the police officer in a small town illustrates that sometimes it helps to bend the rules a little. The officer stopped a motorist speeding down Main Street and the anxious driver begged, "Officer, I can explain..." Without giving the poor guy a chance to say anything, the officer snapped, "Quiet! You're gonna cool your heels in a jail cell until the chief gets back..." Again the poor driver pleaded, "But officer, I just wanted to say..." And, the officer interrupted, "I said to keep quiet! You're going to jail!" A few hours later the officer looked in on his prisoner and said, "Lucky for you that the chief is at his daughter's wedding. He'll be in a good mood when he gets back." In the corner of the cell, the driver moaned, "Don't count on it, I'm the groom." I'll bet, when the chief found out, he wouldn't be in a very good mood and I bet the officer wished that he had been more willing to listen and to bend the rules a little and to be a little kinder and gentler and forgiving.

### **Isaiah 58:9-14**

In a way, this joke can applied to religion. Because what is God like? Does God demand strict adherence to His laws and commandments, like the deputy, or does God allow for some "wiggle-room"? What do you think? Well, you folks know me. I'd opt for a God who doesn't

expect perfection, a God who gives me freewill and allows me to make mistakes, a God who has a sense of humor. The Jewish comedian Woody Allen knew God had a sense of humor because he said, “if you want to hear God laugh, tell God your plans.” But, our Isaiah lesson shows us still another dimension of God. Not a God who judges and punishes and not a God who tolerates our sin and imperfections, but a God who is with us, no matter what. As I’ve told you several times, scholars consider chapters 56 through 66 in Isaiah to be composed by a Third Isaiah (probably a disciple of the original Isaiah) and is encouraging the exiles who were returning to Palestine after the Babylonian exile. Most Americans can’t even imagine the kind of devastation facing the returning exiles. I think it would be a lot like the scenes we see in Gaza today. Piles of rubble and desolation. People wandering aimlessly or huddled in the shelter of destroyed buildings which were once their homes. Into that forlorn reality, Third Isaiah speaks a word of hope, “Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer... and he will say, ‘Here I am.’ If you remove the yoke from among you, the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil, if you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness... The Lord will guide you continually and satisfy your needs in parched places...” If I were standing in that devastation, I would scoff and mutter, “Impossible!” But, Third Isaiah believes that with God nothing is impossible and declares, “Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt... you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in.” But, he adds this caveat, “If you refrain from trampling the Sabbath, from pursuing your own interests on my holy day; if you call the Sabbath a delight and the holy day of the Lord honorable; if you honor it, not going your own ways, serving your own interests or pursuing your own affairs; then you shall take delight in the Lord.. I will feed you with the heritage of your ancestor Jacob...” In other words, make time for God in your life. Maybe this is something Americans need to do. Instead of our devastation and desolation of isolation, anger, fear, and division, making room for God in our lives can rebuild the ruins of our lives and restore the streets we live in. As we learned in Confirmation, the sabbath isn’t merely a day; it is a time to be in relationship with our Almighty and loving God.

## **Psalm 103**

We know that David, who wrote today's psalm, had a relationship with God because so many of his psalms express his gratitude for God's faithfulness. Even when he wrote laments, in the end, he always acknowledged God's steadfast and was thankful. David knew his God was loving and forgiving and not like that rigid law-and-order deputy. Even though David committed adultery and murder, in Psalm 51, he prays, "Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy, blot out my transgressions... Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation..." We hear those same themes echoed in today's psalm, "(God) forgives all your iniquity... heals all your diseases... redeems your life from the Pit... crowns you with steadfast love and mercy... The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love." David knew that he wasn't perfect, but more importantly he knew that God loved him. And, because he had such confidence in God he could endure every challenge and calamity that came, even the betrayal of his beloved son, Absalom. David forgave Absalom. How many of us can learn from David and forgive those who have trespassed against us? As Nelson Mandela said, "Resentment is like drinking poison and then hoping it will kill your enemies." That's why Jesus taught us to pray, "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us."

### **Luke 13:10-17**

So many of us Christians tend to be judgmental and I'm probably as guilty as anyone. In our gospel, Luke speaks to that as Jesus confronts the synagogue leaders after he has healed a crippled woman on the sabbath and the self-righteous head man accuses Jesus, "There are six days on which work ought to be done; come on those days... and not on the Sabbath day." Jesus quickly answers, "You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey... and lead it to water? And ought not this woman... whom Satan bound for eighteen long years, be set free from this bondage on the Sabbath day?" That reminds us that Jesus also said in Mark's gospel, "The Sabbath was made for people, not people for the Sabbath." The sabbath is for us to make time to be in relationship with God. It can be a sabbath when we say our table grace; it can be when we take ten minutes to read our

devotion from “Portals of Prayer”; it can be worshiping in church on Sundays. The sabbath was made for us to be in relationship with our loving and gracious God. That’s why I keep stressing don’t just read and say the words, pay attention to what you’re reading, pray the words. Make God your focus, not when this sermon is over.

### **Hebrews 12:18-29, The Call and the Challenge**

Like Jeremiah told us last week and our lesson from the letter to the Hebrews says, God isn’t far off; God is very near. Our epistle lesson tells us, “You have not come to something that can be touched, a blazing fire, and darkness... and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that not another word be spoken to them.” We shouldn’t have to be afraid of God. So, the writer continues, “But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem... and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant...” And, almost as if he is recalling today’s psalm, he charges us to be grateful, “Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable worship with reverence and awe...” Remember worship is about God, not us, not our feelings, not our problems. As in ancient Judaism, worship in the presence of God is like being back in the Garden before Adam and Eve’s rebellion, walking and talking with God. Being in God’s presence. So, contradicting what the writer says, we can come to something that can be touched when we worship. We can come to Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant. We can come to Jesus when we partake of his Body and his Blood because he is present in the Bread and Wine. Not only as something to be touched, but as a spiritual reality, the real presence of Jesus. And, if we can come to Jesus in that unexplainable way and know that we are forgiven of anything that separates us from God - our doubt, our fear, our guilt, whatever. Then, God the Holy Spirit will assure us that we are not alone. Because God is with us, glorious things of our ministry will be spoken, not because we are so great, but because we will see that our ministries are founded on the Rock of Ages. Because of our faith, our fears are washed away by God’s river of grace. Because of our faith, God feed with Bread and Wine which sustains us as manna in the wilderness of the chaos and division. Because of our faith, glorious things have been realized in our ministry here for seventy years with more to come.