

Turn to the LORD

✦ from low thoughts (vv.6-7)

✦ to high plans (vv.8-9)

In the name of Jesus the Captain of our souls, dearly redeemed:

Ever hear someone say, “Don’t get me started,” then they go on to talk about it anyway? Or, “I don’t want to talk about it,” when they actually brought it up? “To make a long story short...” Really?

Usually we humans need to talk about whatever “it” is. It’s been hard with COVID shut-downs, shut-ins, and quarantines. This week we’re launching our CARING CONNECTION program to offer conversation to New Life members. God bless this effort to show Christ’s love to our New Life family.

Sometimes news is so shocking you feel crushed, shattered, speechless – too much to talk to anyone. It might even be hard to pray about it, because you can only think of one word, “Why?” Or two words, “Why me?” This Book of Books we call the Bible is full of conversations with God. More importantly, it’s God’s conversation with us to open His heart and draw us in to **Turn to the LORD...**

✦ from low thoughts (vv.6-7)

Surprising! In sixty-six chapters Isaiah rarely asks God, “Why?” He volunteers, “Here I am. Send me!” then the Lord commands: **“Go! You are to tell this people, ‘Keep listening, but you will never understand. Keep looking, but you will never get it.’ Make the heart of this people calloused. Make their ears deaf and blind their eyes, so that they do not see with their eyes, or hear with their ears, or understand with their hearts, and turn again and be healed.”** Isaiah only asks, **“Lord, how long?”** God answers: **“Until the cities are a wasteland without a single inhabitant, until the houses are totally deserted, and the farmland is completely devastated, until the Lord has removed the people far away, and the abandoned places within the land are many.”** (6:8–12 EHV¹) From bad to worse until the Exile!

Isaiah knew all about **low thoughts** reaching back to that last of the Judges, Samuel, wondering why the people rejected him and his sons. The LORD explained: **“Listen to the voice of the people...It is not you whom they have rejected. I am the one they have rejected as king over them....They have forsaken me and served other gods, and now they are also acting the same way toward you. So now listen to them. Nevertheless, warn them strongly and show them what the king who reigns over them will do.”** (1 Samuel 8:7–9 EHV) God gives warnings about stubborn sins, but as we hear in Romans 1, God can also give sinners over to more sin to suffer the consequences. Have mercy, Lord!

Some hurting heart might say, “Forget this church talk. Don’t get me started on politics! My life hurts. Why me!?!?” That was Job’s question, wasn’t it? Job kept demanding why God said he was **“blameless and upright, a man who feared God and turned away from evil”** (1:1), then took his family, wealth, even his health? God only answers with a call to repentance for Job, Isaiah, Samuel, us: **“Seek the LORD while he may be found! Call on him while he is near! Let the wicked man abandon his way. Let an evil man abandon his thoughts. Let him turn to the LORD, and he will show him mercy. Let him turn to our God, because he will abundantly pardon.”** Can you hear God inviting the **wicked** and **evil**?

It’s good if you can admit your talent is “on loan from God.” He’s the source of all good and the Judge to whom we will all answer someday. We all need to see that the influential, the rich and powerful

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are not above cancer or COVID. Those who rejoice in the suffering of their enemies are calling down God's wrath on themselves. Do you find yourself bouncing like a Ping-Pong ball between self-righteousness and despair? Leveling the mass of humanity, the Holy Spirit says through Paul, **"God has bound everyone over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all."** (Romans 11:32 NIV)

Remember Jesus asking, "Why me?" One of the criminals confessed that they deserved to die, but not Jesus. Christ cried out from the cross: **"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"** It was all for us, recorded 1000 years before Christ in Psalm 22, which ends in triumph for us: **"All the rich of the earth will eat and bow down. All who go down to the dust will kneel before him – those who cannot keep themselves alive. Descendants will serve him. For generations people will be told about the Lord. They will come and proclaim his righteousness to a people yet to be born – because he has done it."** (Psalm 22:1f, 29–31) **Turn to the LORD** who lifts our hearts, souls and minds **from low thoughts...**

✦ to high plans (vv.8-9)

"Certainly my plans are not your plans, and your ways are not my ways, declares the LORD. Just as the heavens are higher than the earth, so my ways are higher than your ways, and my plans are higher than your plans." (Isaiah 55:8f EHV) We can learn so much from respectful listening.

Years ago, a sister member reported that the wife of a conservative candidate for governor was really pushing the buttons of the female news reporters. She would say things like, "My husband is my head, and I really like it!" She was a former feminist, openly repentant of pro-abortion. When her husband's first wife died in a car accident carrying their child, he made sure there were two caskets at the funeral, one for her and one for the baby. The candidate's young wife was kind enough to return my call to campaign headquarters. "You talk, I'll type for my sermon: What made you become a Christian?"

"It's wasn't just one thing or a single event," she shared. "I was getting discouraged because I noticed that for all our talk, my feminist sisters and I were so easily manipulated. We were not as strong as we kept telling ourselves and everyone else. On my birthday I went into a store to buy myself a present." She paused for a moment to let that sink in, then went on. "I didn't realize it was a Christian bookstore until I got home and played my new CD. The Christian music touched my soul like nothing I'd heard before. I realized that God had opened a window to my heart which could close again at any time. Not long after that I met my husband who taught me more about Jesus and His love for me." God gave her children of her own in a large family where she will never have to buy her own present again.

A Christian pastor once commented: "The Lord comes to your door....Think not you will find the Lord when he has once gone, though you traverse the world. While he is near, you may seek and find; as Isaiah says (ch 55,6), **'Seek the LORD while he may be found!'** If through your neglect he pass by, all seeking then will be in vain. For more than twenty years in my cloister I experienced the meaning of such disappointment. I sought God with great toil and with severe mortification of the body, fasting, watching, singing and praying. In this I shamefully wasted my time and found not the Lord. The more I sought and the nearer I thought I was to him, the farther away I got. No, God does not permit us to find him so. He must first come and seek us where we are. We may not pursue and overtake him. This is not his will."²

You know, coming out of COVID for many will be much harder than going in. That was a sudden government order to shut everything down. Like it or not, everyone did. Now there are personal, professional, and family decisions to make about gatherings we've been missing for so long. The virus seems to be waning, but what's safe? Remember this too shall pass, this little moment in time.

Today dear Jesus knocks at your heart's door with **high plans** for heaven. In Revelation (3:20) this generous offer: **"Look, I stand at the door and I am knocking. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will go in with him and dine with him, and he with me."** Open wide to mercy. Amen.

² *Sermons of Martin Luther*, a.k.a. "Luther's Postil." Lenker, ed. Baker Book House, re-printed 1988, Vol. VIII, p. 322. For *The Preacher's Apprentice (TPA)* sermon study or copies: m.cordes@comast.net . New Life Evangelical Lutheran Church You can also call: 651-484-1169. Hear the sermon at www.newlifeshoreview.com . 180 County Rd F - Shoreview, MN 55126