

“SEEKING THE GOD WHO SEEKS US.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

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Scripture Texts: Psalm 34:8-10; 63:1; Isaiah 55:6; Hebrews 4:16

Prayer: Holy Father, we humble ourselves before your Holy Word and acknowledge we need the help of your Holy Spirit, to enable me to preach in a manner worthy of the excellency of your Word, and to enable us to hear and understand and obey in a manner worthy of the clarity of your Word. Come, Holy Spirit, hear and answer in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

Introduction.

In the past two weeks you have heard two sermons from two very different preachers, both proclaiming God’s great love for us, how delights in His people and sings over us.

And His love for us is not blind. He knows us completely and His love is absolutely realistic. He already knows the very worst about us and He cannot be blindsided or become disillusioned in any way that would diminish His love for us.

For reasons that are almost too much to consider God purposefully wants to love us and be our God and have us as His children, as His friends. So much so He is willing to have His own Son die for us to make it all possible.

Von Golder and I both tried to make it clear that the gospel is first and foremost about a loving, forgiving God seeking and pursuing us.

How do we react when we discover this love, this forgiveness, this grace and mercy, this incredible and undeserved kindness and generosity?

Von used the great Scriptural analogy last week of the slave and the son both working in the father’s field, but they are working for very different reasons.

As sons and daughters anything we do in response to God’s love is not out of duty or out of trying to earn God’s love, it is out of love and gratitude, and in the knowledge we have a share in His grace and inheritance.

This morning I want to call us to respond to His great love. I want to awaken our souls, to stir us up to love God. To whom so much has been given, much is expected.

Seeking the God who seeks us.

There are two pursuits, God seeking and pursuing us, and us seeking and pursuing God. God loves us and wants to be loved. God seeks us and waits to be sought by us.

Psalm 14:2 The Lord looks down from heaven on the children of man, to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God.

He gave everything to acquire us. Now He is looking for people who would give everything for Him, who see Him as the most precious treasure, the pearl of great price.

Responding to God's pursuit of us by pursuing Him back is what He created us for. It's the reason for our existence. We are created in His image, we have eternal souls designed to know God and to respond to His reaching out to us.

Acts 17:26-27 He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, ... 27 that they would seek God, ... though He is not far from each one of us.

So how do we pursue this God who pursues us?

What should characterize our seeking?

I want to suggest that you already know how. If fact in the earthly realm you have done it many times. Maybe looking for a wallet or purse or cell phone; or a wife, a job, a promotion.

When in your life have you been the most earnest in seeking something? Think about it? I can think of a time when my seeking was exceedingly strong, focused, with an intensity that involved every cell and fiber of my body and mind?

It was Fourth of July in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Our family went with another family down to the waterfront for the huge fireworks display with thousands of people. Marc was about two years old and some of the kids were pulling him around in a little wagon. When they came back to our blanket area, Phama asked where Marc was and they said he wanted to get out so they let him out. Instantly four adults started a frantic search for a little boy in a sea of big people.

You try not to panic, you run in every direction, you ask for help. You are on one mission and it has your undivided attention. It is one of those times when we are more focused than ever.

The Hebrew word for seek (baqash) has a very strong meaning, like losing your child in a crowded mall. It means to search out, to strive after, to ask, beg, beseech, desire.

Other Hebrew words relate to seeking to inquire of the Lord, but this word especially relates to seeking God Himself, seeking His face (I Chron. 16:11), seeking His presence continually, setting our mind on things above.

Hunger and thirst.

But our hearts and souls are so easily distracted, we grow spiritually dull, we get so full of the sweets of this world we lose our hunger and thirsty for what is truly good and what we are created to receive.

Have you ever heard anyone say things like my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God. Or only one thing do I desire, to dwell in the house of the Lord and gaze on the beauty of the Lord. Where is the Christian who says my soul thirsts and pants for the living God?

Who says God's love is better than life? Who says zeal for God's house consumes me?

C.S. Lewis wrote long ago that the problem with Christians is that we are half-hearted creatures, fooling around with our faith when infinite joy is being held out to us. The problem is not that we desire too much, but that we desire so little. Why have we settled for so little when in His presence is the fullness of joy, at His right hand are pleasures forever? Why won't we taste and see just how good the Lord is? The psalmist was unashamed in expressing his passion and zeal.

The sad reality is many of us are dying of spiritual dehydration next to a pool of living water. We are too busy or absorbed with daily life to give attention to the state of our souls.

We need to wake up to our drought conditions. I just learned of the severe three year drought in Cape Town, SA. They have strict rationing down to 13 gallons of water per person per day for drinking, cooking, showering, doing laundry and flushing toilets. May 11 has been set as "zero day" when the city will turn off the water and a million people will have to stand in lines for water.

Can we even imagine being desperate for water? Not here in the NW, our abundance of water makes us complacent, we take it for granted, we don't even think about it.

Psalm 63 was written by David in the wilderness near the Dead Sea, in a dry and weary land where there was no water. He wrote out of a clear and desperate sense of his own inadequacy and of his need for God. His physical surroundings awaken in him a sense of his spiritual lack.

Thirst is one of our most fundamental human needs, it is imperative that we have water. How do we cultivate a hunger and thirst for God that mirrors our own physical need for water?

To what length would you be willing to go to to seek God, to deepen your relationship with God?

Now days with smart phones you can find almost anything. They have apps for everything. With Google all you have to ask is where is the nearest gas station or coffee shop and there you are, with a map, directions, time to destination, a voice to guide you and a dozen reviews.

We have spiritual apps to help us.

If we return to the image of being spiritually dehydrated while living near a river of living water, what are the grace irrigation lines we need to lay down to get that water into the soil of our lives?

There are means of grace that are spiritual irrigation lines that get God's grace into our lives. Things like His creation, His Word, prayer, worship and fellowship with other believers.

There are also obstacles to our presence with Him that must be removed, sin, disobedience, whatever dulls our spiritual sensitivity. It might not be sin, but just something that is not profitable for our souls, that is soul depleting, things we watch or do that are not edifying.

A key to all of this is asking God to seek us and enable us to seek Him. Asking Him to help us overcome obstacles, overcome dullness, overcome our own laziness and inertia, the desire to just coast, to continue the spiritual status quo.

We are going to spend the next two weeks watching athletes from all over the world do some incredible things, all because they overcame the human tendency toward laziness. They overcame pain and sacrifice, overcame the "I can't do it" voice in their head.

I wish I could play the piano. But after one semester in college, I never went back to it. I wish I was fluent in a second language, but I never kept at it and let it slip away. I wish I had finished memorizing the book of James but after the first chapter I quit.

For some of us the obstacle is "I don't know what to do or where to start?"

If your child or grandchild asks you a question you don't know the answer to, what do you say? Do you say, "I don't know" and leave it at that. That's inertia.

Or do you say, "I don't know, but let's find out." That's overcoming inertia. That's overcoming the tendency to remain passive.

Ask God to help and enable and strength your desire and ability to seek Him. Start moving toward Him.

God has made huge promises to those who seek Him.

Psalms 34:8-10 ... those who seek the Lord lack no good thing.

Proverbs 8:17 I love those who love me, and those who seek me diligently find me.

Lamentations 3:25 The Lord is good to those who wait for him, to the soul who seeks him.

Matthew 5:6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Matthew 6:33 Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

Matthew 7:7 Ask, and it will be given you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.

Hebrews 11:6 He rewards those who seek him.

Implications and Application.

Next Sunday begins the season of Lent. It is often seen as a penitential season, a time of giving more serious attention to our sin and to denying ourselves. This year I want to urge us to use this season as a time of seeking God more seriously, pursuing this God who loves us so much He sings over us.

I urge us all to cultivate an intense longing for God. Complacency and shallowness are the deadly enemies of any spiritual growth or life or worship. Jesus wants to be wanted. He draws out our earnestness.

It's not complicated, it's not magical, it's not something only for the pious or the fanatic. I ask for it constantly. "Change my heart, Oh God. Draw me nearer, Lord. Increase my love and longing."

I urge us to hunger and thirst for righteousness and for His kingdom, and to ask for more hunger and thirst.

I plead with you to ask and seek and knock with persistence. I implore you to press on and take hold of the Lord and like Jacob wrestle and not let go until He gives you His blessing. I want the best for you and God is the best. Who goes to the Olympics hoping for a bronze? I hold out to you the best treasure.

I propose two specific ways for us to do this.

Lent lasts for 40 days from this Wednesday which is Ash Wednesday to Easter Sunday. I urge you for 40 days to make prayer a priority and to specifically ask God to draw you closer to Him, to help you seek Him with a greater hunger and thirst.

40 days, either in the morning or on a break or in the evening, at meals, but some focused time in prayer. Use these Scriptures as your prayer and the verses before and after these.

Add verses like Psalm 27, 43, 84; II Chronicles 7:14; the prayers of Paul in Ephesians 1 and 3; Philippians 1 and Colossians 1.

The second thing I propose is for the seven Sundays of Lent, from next week to Easter, for a group of you to gather in the council room from 8:45 to 9:15 am for a time of prayer for our worship services and for our flock. That's it, just prayer. Just seeking God and seeking His blessing and favor on our seeking of Him in worship.

Would you be willing to come and be a part of that?

If we will seek God we will be pursuing what we are made for. What is better than knowing our God? He is better than life, and makes the rest of life make sense. By God's power and grace let's stir up a greater longing for the One who longs for us.

Hebrews 4:16 Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Prayer: Holy Father, "shatter our complacency. Disrupt our indifference. Move us off dead center. Overcome our spiritual inertia." Fill us with greater longing, greater hunger and thirst for living bread and living water. By your grace, may we increasingly be people who love you and seek you with all our heart and are found by you, for the sake of Jesus, Amen.