

## **Sermon Draft**

**Text: Isaiah 51:1–6**

### **Sermon: God Is Calling**

The *Gospel* for this Sunday is Peter's confession. Matthew 16:18 emphasizes that the kingdom of God will not be overcome. God is the one who both reveals the Messiah to Peter and also promises to sustain the community in spite of opposition. The revealing of God's salvation and the sustaining of the community are also the two emphases within the *Old Testament Reading*, the text today.

Our text is set within perhaps the most hopeful chapters of the Book of Isaiah, if not the most hopeful of the entire Old Testament. It comes after Isaiah's strong anti-idolatry polemic that shows the people have lost their righteous standing before Yahweh. Now, he reaches out to them with a message of restoration after exile.

The people have been brought to repentance, and now they hear the message of hope. They are effectively dead in their sin, but Yahweh brings them to life.

“Ready or not, here I come!” And so begins the great game of hide-and-seek. It’s one of those quintessential childhood games. The suspense and the drama. The looking . . . the not finding . . . the seeking . . . looking and seeking. Meanwhile, those being sought are carefully and discreetly silent. Hiding. The fun is in not being found, stealing an occasional glance to watch the seeker go here and there befuddled.

Not so with our God. Today, God calls out to those who are looking: **“Listen to me, pursuers of righteousness!”** God’s delight is not in seeing us confused, frustrated, aimless. Not in hiding. Rather, God seeks us and makes us his redeemed children.

God calls out, "***You who pursue righteousness, you who seek Yahweh!***"

One may wonder were there any pursuers of righteousness in Isaiah? Looking at their history it doesn't seem so. Isaiah had just finished a long discourse describing how salvation eludes God's people because of their idolatry. God was hidden from them.

They sought him and couldn't find him. They begin to feel a sense of desperation and despair. They had walked away from God as so many have done and then in times of need and fear they start looking for something, someone.

They were looking but not finding. These are the ones who say, "Ready or not . . . and look and look and look until they are ready to give up.

Without having any idea where to look, people do seek God. Augustine famously wrote, "Our hearts are restless until they rest in thee." The Lord's people are longing for him. This is the image implied in Isaiah's language of "**the wilderness**" (v 3).

These are the times in life when we feel like a barren desert, when God seems far off. Even though when we go outside it doesn't seem like a wilderness it can be when one is lost and looking. We can feel alone, as if we don't belong. Left on our own, we could never find God.

The Small Catechism's explanation of the Third Article captures the irony: "**I believe that I cannot, by my own reason or strength, believe.**" This could be a tragic reality except that God is calling us. **The Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith.**

***In the same way He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith.***

Yes, on their own in their sinfulness and arrogance they were lost and so are we but into this situation in our aimlessness, our Lord calls out. To Israel He said, ***“Look to Abraham and Sarah”*** (v 2). God points to Abraham and Sarah with a lifeless image: a rock (v 1b). Like a rock, they were as good as dead—old and barren. They surely weren’t kids who could play and win at seeking God if he hid himself. So, God called them without their seeking or asking.

God’s people are hewn from dead rocks like that. Like Isaiah’s people, we were dead in our sins. We couldn’t win at seeking a hiding God. So, God takes the dead and makes us alive. That’s the reason for Christ himself dying and then becoming alive again.

By Baptism, Christ's death and resurrection is ours; we are buried and raised to life. God doesn't wait to be found. God finds us.

God continues to call out to us through his Word: **"Torah will go out from me"** (v 4). We usually translate "Torah" as "law," but it's better to understand this Hebrew word as referring to God's entire revelation. Isaiah 2:2–5 looked to a coming day in which all the nations would stream to Zion for Torah. That day has come when God reaches out in the Word that became flesh and continues to reach out through the Word and Sacraments.

**"Look to Abraham and Sarah!"** No more a dead rock, a barren wilderness! God brings renewal in a new creation; the wilderness is transformed into Eden (v 3). Isaiah's hearers remembered stories of Israel's wanderings in the wilderness. The wilderness was a place of difficulty.

But God carried his people through the wilderness into the Promised Land. The wilderness here in our text anticipates God bringing his people back home after the exile. That salvation will come. But even when it does, life in this period will be marginalized within the massive Persian empire.

God had in mind something much greater: ***“the wilderness”*** utterly transformed. We are now living in the wilderness between our Baptism and the Last Day. God bursts in to comfort us. “Comfort” here means “restoration.” Just as God spoke and Eden happened, God speaks and we are restored. God carries us until he comes again to restore creation to Eden-Even-Better. The image is that of utter transformation and renewal.

The suspense builds. “Ready or not . . . !” Some are good at hiding, but if you’ve ever played hide-and-seek with a young

child, it goes a little bit differently.

“Ready or not” and the suspense is more than a four-year-old can handle. “Here I am”—and giggles abound. You who seek, these are the ones to whom God speaks today.

The seeking is not the point; rather, we have a God who makes himself found, who reaches out to those who are dead in sin and makes them alive in Christ, who even brings them to be with him forever.

Amen