

Epiphany 5 - February 5, 2023
Text: Isaiah 58: 3-9a
Theme: Life Under Grace

None of us are perfect and thank God that He knows that. He was there in the Garden of Eden, and He saw us fall into sin. More than anyone else in this universe, He knows that if we were left on our own, we would have no hope. We would all be destined for Hell. There are people who live their lives with this fear. They are uncertain as to whether they will go to Heaven. Some of them are Christian people. If you ask them what they believe happens when you die, they will say "Well, I hope I go to Heaven, but I don't know." Maybe some of them say this from a sense of false humility. Because they don't understand that their reception into Heaven has absolutely nothing to do with their behavior, they are afraid of looking proud or haughty by saying that they are certain that they will be in Heaven when they die. But I know for a fact that many people simply are not sure. I think it must be horrible to live under that kind of burden, the burden of the Law, and I thank God all the time that I live under Grace.

Life under the Law can look different for different people. I have known some people who beat themselves up incessantly for every perceived failure in their lives. They never let anything go. They just keep on being miserable and harping on what they did wrong as a parent, a teacher, a child, a spouse, whatever. No matter what anyone says to dispel them of the illusion that they are horrible people, they just

keep on flogging themselves. Isaiah talks about these people in the Old Testament text we have before us today.

The people of Israel are complaining that God has not duly noted the many things they have done in service to him. They have fasted and humbled themselves and yet God has not relieved them of their troubles. What good is God if He doesn't relieve you of your burdens? The people I was talking about who cannot let their failures go seem to want God to drop in and tell them that they have been forgiven. But He has done that, and they don't listen. He speaks His forgiveness through me in the absolution to us practically every week. The Baptismal font is open so that you can dip your fingers into the water as you come forward to receive the Lord's Supper and remember that your sinful nature is continually being drowned and you wear the robes of Christ so that God sees no sin in you but only Christ. You receive the true body and blood of Jesus Christ which forgives all your sins and empowers your faith. What more do you need so that you would believe that you are forgiven of every sin? There is no sin more powerful than Jesus Christ and when you won't let it go – your sin or someone else's sin, that's what you're saying...that Jesus is not powerful enough for that sin.

Another type of person who lives under the Law is the person who keeps trying to work off their sin by doing what they believe are good works. Now remember that a true "good work" according to God is

anything done in faith for the glory of God and the good of your neighbor. But human beings like to define “good work” in a variety of ways all which benefit their cause. The people to whom Isaiah spoke thought they should get some kind of credit for their fasting. If I follow all the prescribed rules (and in all honesty, these people probably did), why shouldn’t I get kudos from God? I should get a better job, better grades, better health, something! This person does not understand that the Law is for them not God.

God gave us the Law as a gift. If we keep it, we have better lives on earth but there is no promise that the sinful world will be kept away from us. For instance, if you keep the 3rd Commandment and take every opportunity to worship God and study His Word, you will have more peace in your life. You will have greater understanding of life, but you do not reduce your chances of stroke or heart disease. If you keep the 6th Commandment and strive to live a sexually chaste and decent life, you will avoid many broken relationships, you will have less shame and guilt, you will not objectify other human beings a though they were not children of God. But you will be no less likely to suffer from job loss and financial hardship. The Law is given for us. If we keep the Law or don’t keep the Law, God is still God and He has no need for us to keep the Law.

Much in the same way, General Motors was kind enough to put an owner's manual in my glove box when I bought my car. However, they do not send me prizes for following the maintenance recommendations. Nor do they fine me or imprison me if I fail to follow the maintenance recommendations. The maintenance recommendations are there for me, not them. They built the machine and are simply trying to help me take care of it so that it remains useful as long as possible. God built the machine and set it in motion. His Law is only to help us live as peacefully and joyfully as is possible in this sin fallen world.

Choose to live under grace instead of under the Law. Live as the children of God who have had all their sins washed away. There is nothing for which we need to be guilty. We are forgiven. There is nothing for which we should be ashamed. We are forgiven. There is nothing we need to fix. We are forgiven. We are filled with the body and blood of Christ, washed in the waters of baptism, and we are the temple of the Holy Spirit Himself. Let go of everything that does not belong in you; guilt, shame, regrets, and live under grace.

You have called, and the LORD has answered. You have cried, and He has said to you, "Here I am." You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world. Rejoice!