

Pentecost 13
Isaiah 29:13-20
August 30, 2009

These words were first delivered to the people of Judah and Jerusalem, all descendants of Abraham, of Isaac, of Jacob. Yes, they were descendants of Judah from whom God promised the Savior of the world would come. He would rescue from sin, death, satan, and hell.

These words show us again what St. Paul said, "Not all Israel is Israel." Some of them, many, in fact, were only an external Israel, not the true, spiritual Israel.

Since these words were first addressed to a people who counted themselves God's people but who nonetheless were mostly not God's people at all, these same words certainly need to make us think, we who count ourselves to be God's people.

Many of these words are harsh, hard-hitting law, but the Gospel comes out on top. We see that.

Even in the Face of Unbelief, God Works for Faith!

In a world of wickedness, of God-denying, stubborn impenitence and hypocrisy, God still makes His believers.

To the citizens of Judah and Jerusalem, God said, "These people come near to Me with their mouth and home Me with their lips, but their hearts are far from Me." That describes a hypocrite. We could even add various deeds to go along with the words of mouth and lips. But when the heart is not in it, it is not real worship at all. Let's remember that as we hear God describe other forms of wickedness with these verses. The plans, the attitudes were carried on by people who went to temple, offered the required sacrifices, kept the big religious festivals, offered their prayers. But their hearts weren't in any of it.

That's the Bible's way of saying that they did not trust in their Savior, did not rely upon what God said, did not look to Him to rescue them from their sin. Indeed, they denied that there was much sin in them. They denied that there was absolute right and wrong, in fact.

'No heart' means their religion did not include the Gospel. Their religion seemed to be based on what God said, but all of it had become a list of rules to perform and nothing more. Sadly, however, it is impossible to keep any law of God except from a heart that trusts in God as one's Savior. With no Gospel, God's laws cannot be obeyed.

Hypocrisy only works in the neighborhood of true religion. Let us all be warned about that. Religion without faith in our Savior is really 100% human rules and sadly, 100% Gospel-free.

How easy is it to try to plan without God, yet, how useless. There are two forms of this godlessness. One, of course, is to plan what is plainly wicked, to plan what clearly is against God's will. There's always plenty of that – Planning to steal, planning to kill, planning to cheat, planning to lie, to get even, etc.

The other form is more subtle, just as useless, easier even for God's people to fall into. It is to plan without God. We plan to do this and that – not bad things in themselves – but we just leave God out of the plans. We give no thought to God at all. That too is godless planning. We should not be surprised when nothing comes of such plans.

There is another great temptation for all of us sinner. It is a basic sin. Sin is very much still in us, that original sinfulness. Basic sin tries to make us think or act like we are god and that we can turn God into whatever we want.

People, we are clay. God is the Potter. He created us. We do not make Him. People are always talking about what God is like. It's based on nothing but what they think. Or they do away with Him altogether. For 150 years, the worldly "wise" and intelligent say, "The whole universe, including human beings has evolved over time into what it is today. God is not needed, but if you need God, then go ahead and make Him fit your needs."

So, the pot has said to the Potter, "You didn't make me!" The pot has said to the Potter, "You know nothing. I know more than you do!"

That's an extreme example of perverseness. Lesser examples of it are very easy for us to adopt, though. We excuse our pet sins and assume God does too. We play the buffet style of religion. We chose to believe and follow certain agreeable parts of the Bible and ignore, argue, or twist the parts we don't like.

What a world! Sin has corrupted us and God, in the face of all this, does not give up. He doesn't even just send us all off to eternal perdition and leave it at that. God says, "Once more I will astound these people with wondrous wonder; the wisdom of the wise will perish, the intelligence of the intelligent will vanish."

All "wisdom" against God will fail. It knows nothing at all. It couldn't find God even if it wanted to. It'll never gain unity with God. It will end in death!

On the other hand, God's wisdom is the Gospel itself. All wisdom is in Jesus Christ.

When God's laws show us to be sinners in every way, idolaters, with an inner self out of which flows a flood of evils – evil thoughts, hate, harm, greed, lies, slander, jealousy, adulteries and immoralities, dishonesties, discontent, complaining, dirty talk, then comes

Jesus for us.

He has forgiven us all our sin. He has provided us with His own righteousness. He has delivered us from death. He has defeated satan. He loved the whole world that way, and so he gives sight to the blind, a spiritual sight enabling us to see His Words. He gives us ears to hear what He says in His Word. He gives us His own mind, His knowledge, His wisdom, His thinking in the Bible. And with forgiveness and new life – all from Him, comes rejoicing. And finally, outside of this world, with Him forever, we will be free of the ruthless (the violent), free from the mockers (who reject God's truth), free from those always on the watch for an opportunity to do evil. Indeed, we will be free of our sinfulness entirely. All this is from Jesus.

We have good reason to be humble, don't we? We are sinful. God is good, great, strong, and He is merciful, our Savior. Even in the face of unbelief and wickedness, God still works for faith. Amen.