

Theme: Our God is Surprising and Amazing

Text: Isaiah 25:6-9

“Grace and peace to you from God our Father, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit who has brought us together”. Amen

Out text for meditation for this morning is from the first reading of today - Isaiah 25:6-9. Let us pray: O Lord, we pray, speak in the calming of our minds and in the longings of our hearts, by the words of my lips and in the thoughts that we form. Speak, O Lord, for your servants listen. Amen.

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In our text the prophet Isaiah looks forward to a time when the God of Israel will rise up to do something decisive in history, something to right all the wrongs, something to straighten out all the crooked things, to heal the broken people. And in this time the prophet sees all the nations of the world coming to Mount Zion, the mountain of the Lord, to pay their tribute to the God of Israel.

And in this time all the nations of the world are to share in the great celebration meal given by the God of Israel. They are to have fellowship with this God and with his people. Amazing! These nations who persecuted and dominated God’s people, these nations who spat on and despised God’s people, these are now to sit at the same table with God’s people?

They are now to eat the best foods together with God’s people? They are to be fed by our God? Is not this amazing? Yes, it is. Who would have believed it? Who can comprehend it? And there is more. Not only are all the ancient hatreds and fears between the nations ended, not only do all share together in the meal of God, but also the ancient enemy death is abolished. Death is swallowed. Who’s head is not reeling now? Who can believe it all? Peace and harmony among all peoples. Death and mourning ended. This is too much for one sitting, too good to believe. This is what we have always hoped for, but never thought we would see. Yet, it is just like our God to surprise us. Yes, indeed, “This is our God; we have waited for him.”

This is our God, this God who surprises us, this God who is not bound by convention, nor tradition, nor human expectation, nor even the way he has acted in the past. This is our God. He does new and unexpected things. This is our God. He surprises us with his freedom and frees us by his surprises. This is the God of creation, who surprised the very elements by forming the vast and expansive universe. This is our God who surprised us in our sin then clothed us in his grace for modesty’s sake. This is our God who surprised us by speaking the word of protection for the first murderer. This is our God who overwhelmed us with water and then saved us with a dry mountain top. This is our surprising God who picked an obscure and old herdsman; Abraham to be the father of his chosen people.

This is our God, an amazing God, who stuck with his rebellious people when they fought among themselves, sold brothers into slavery, broke all his laws, chased after foreign

gods, complained that God did not care about them, yet expected them to do his bidding. "This is our God; we have waited for him."

This God, our God, surprised us again by putting on our flesh, living out our kind of life, living in our kind of joy and sorrow, our kind of laughter and tears. This God amazed us once more by allowing Himself to be killed. And then, surprise of all surprises, He did not stay dead! He rose from death and sits at the right hand of the Father and intercedes for us when we fail due to our wickedness. Who could have guessed it? This God, our God, amazes us with everything He does. So, now He amazes us even more. Now, as the gospel of today says; He sends his servants into the streets to gather anyone to come to His feast. He invites the good and the bad, the cream and the scum, everyone, into His house to eat with Him. Amazing! How many times can God surprise us? He surprises us again and again. Yes, this is our God.

Isaiah reminds us of how good and rich and abundant this feast is, and of all that our Lord has done for us and gives to us here and everyday in His Word and Sacraments. This feast where God gives His best, gives His all, and gives abundance. Isaiah says it was prepared for us on "*the mountain of the Lord*" - which is the mountain we now call Calvary where God gave His best: His only-begotten Son; He gave His all: laying down His life for us; and He gave an abundance: for in His death and resurrection, He offered Himself as the sacrifice for the sin of the world, and He swallowed up death forever.

And so there, on the Calvary, our feast was prepared. There, on Calvary, the Lamb of God was roasted on the cross to be the food for our feast, and He poured out His blood into the cup that gives us life. There, on Calvary, all the Word of God finds its focus, and from there all the Word of God flows to us. There, on Calvary, is the beacon of God to break through the clouds of sin and doubt and disappointment that we see the love of God for us in Jesus; that we may not reject, but rejoice, and be glad in the life and salvation of God. A life and salvation not that He simply demands, but that He gives.

For that is the purpose of His feast - whether it is the feast of Word and Sacrament that we gather here every two weeks to receive, or the feast of Word and prayer that we receive each day - He calls us to come and receive what He has prepared for us. To receive His forgiveness for our sins, His life for our death, and His salvation for our slavery to sin. That is what Jesus is calling you to receive at His feast, and what you can receive nowhere else.

Calvary may not have looked spectacular, but it was. And church may not look spectacular, but it is. And you may not look spectacular, but you are. Because behind the outward appearance of these things is a greater reality - the reality of Christ. Who not only came to Calvary, but has brought Calvary to you, so that He not return to the Father alone, but that He bring you to the Father; that the wedding feast be full.

This, our God, who is fresh with surprise, keeps us alert and alive with his new things. He keeps us alert for he cannot be predicted. We cannot classify all his past actions, feed them to a computer, and thus determine just what He will do next Easter. He cannot be predicted. He keeps us alert. And he keeps us alive, for He cannot be controlled. We cannot mouth certain incantations or pray the sincere prayer thereby guaranteeing that He will do what we decide, not even when two or three are agreed on what we decide.

He will not be predicted or controlled. He is free to change. He is free to amaze us. He keeps us alert and alive. This is our God who has given us salvation. He is not the god of success who guarantees us a high standard of living. That god of success is appealing. He is not the god who beckons us with his promise of continuing improvement; that lures us with the lie that tomorrow will be better than today; with inflation down, wages up; unemployment down and no suffering.

This kind of god does not have the power to surprise us. This god cannot keep us alert and alive. He is not our God. Nor is our God the god of carnality, who guarantees physical enjoyment beyond our wildest fantasies. Ah, he is appealing, too, this god of carnality. He beckons us with his promise of fulfilled erotic dreams. He lures us with the lie that all will be well when we gratify even our slightest carnal whim. He comes through sometimes, too, this god of carnality. But, he is also dull and boring. He cannot begin to amaze us. He cannot keep us alert and alive. He is not our God.

No, our God is new and fresh. Our God is surprising and amazing. Our God does not guarantee success, but tells the successful to give it all away! Amazing! Our God does not tease us with glowing fantasies, but confronts us with the striking worm within us all, and then loves us in spite of the worm. Such a surprise has never been! This keeps us alive. This keeps us alert. This is our God. So, now we gather here to worship this God of surprise, this God of new things. Here we gather in this church, in a place where it would be nice to be surprised, in a time when it would feel good to be amazed.

Too many things recently have been just what we expected. No doubt we have acted just like the former people of God from Cain to Caiaphas. But this is the reason that we come to the church. We seek forgiveness from our amazing God. All too much of what happens in our lives is the dull, warmed-over humdrum of yesterday's monotonous gods.

All too much of what we hear and what we say is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow: wars and rumours of wars, earthquakes and tumults, success stories and lurid carnality, hunger, poverty, starvation, and death. It would feel good for God to lay the unexpected on us. And our God can. This God of life, who cracks the grave like a fresh egg, can bring change and growth, surprise and amazement to our otherwise dull lives. Our God can.

This God of life, who consumes the world's babble to speak one small Word, can create color and sparkle, hope and excitement from the chaos of our dull lives. Our God can. He has. He will. He gives us the hope of unexpected grace. "Lo, this is our God: we have waited for him, that he might save us. This is the Lord; we have waited for him; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation." Amen

"The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keeps your hearts and minds through Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour". Amen