

The greatest kids' game of all time just might be hide and seek. Practically everybody can play it in one form or another, people of all ages. You know how it goes, players hide from one another and hope that they're the last one to be found. Then there's another version of the game where you hide an object and everyone else goes looking for it. Or you can play an even different rendition of that game where everyone stays right where they are and looks for something hidden in plain sight.

This game called, "I Spy with My Little Eye" used to keep our kids occupied on long road trips when they were young. Hide and seek in whichever form you play the game has been around forever! It's something that everyone can relate to. It's something we've all enjoyed.

Do you think God likes to play hide and seek? It kind of sounds like it from our Old Testament text today: "Seek the Lord while He may be found." Of course, unlike real hide and seek God doesn't want to stay hidden from anybody. He wants to be found! He knows that people everywhere are seeking after Him. People are seeking a relationship with God, seeking answers, guidance, and comfort for their lives.

In our Old Testament Lesson, Isaiah shows us that God definitely doesn't want to stay hidden from the world. He reveals Himself, that is He lets Himself be found in unique and powerful ways. Our text begins with this blessed invitation: "Seek the LORD while he may be found. Call on him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon."

From what Isaiah says, it sounds like we're the ones who are on the seeking end down here. It sounds as if we come to faith in God all on our own. But that's actually not the case at all. It turns out there's a little twist in the original Hebrew language that doesn't come through very well in English. In the Hebrew Isaiah says, "Seek the Lord in his letting himself be found." Now that doesn't sound very smooth in English, but it does reflect an important truth that's confirmed in other parts of the Bible: We don't seek out God. God seeks out us. He allows Himself to be found.

Think back again to the game of hide and seek. Have you ever played that with a very young child? When it's your turn to hide, you might "hide" yourself in a place where you know can easily be found. You want that child to feel like he found you, but in reality, you made it easy to "be found." That's what God does. He lets Himself be found. He gives us a conscience that tells us that we

have to answer to a higher being. He put us in a created world that testifies to the existence of a being far greater than ourselves. And then He makes His holy Word available to the world so that people who don't yet know the Lord can "find" Him. It looks like we've found Him, but in reality, He's found us.

Did you notice who it is God is seeking? It's not the corporate elite or political giants. God never said He only wants Hollywood's brightest stars, or the greatest professional athletes, either. God is seeking sinful people, all people, people like you and me, our neighbors, friends, and family. God wants all people to find Him. Through Isaiah, He says: "Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon." God is seeking sinners. He's seeking people who have messed up their lives and have little to be proud of. Why? So that He can have mercy on them. So that He can pardon their sins. So that they will turn to Him and say, "Lord, I've hit rock bottom. I have no way out of the sinful mess I've created. I need you." And so, He picks us out of the pit of sin and sets us free from the punishments of hell.

So, if God wants to be found, where can we find Him? It seems like people are searching for God in every conceivable corner of the universe. Some people think that they can find Him in nature; in a majestic tree, a beautiful sunset, or all around us. Some people take yoga classes because they believe it will connect them closer to God and "spirituality." It's all very subjective. It's all relative. "What works for you might not work for me. If you want to find God in a book, that's your business; I'll find Him somewhere else."

But the fact remains there is objective truth. If someone argues that two plus two equals four for you, but it equals six and a half for him, we'd laugh. The statement is objectively wrong. But no one laughs if someone says that your God is not their god. Really? Is God nothing more than the figment of each person's imagination?

No, the objective truth is that there is one God, and He's placed evidence about Himself in this world and in our consciences. The objective truth is that there is one, true God, and this God seeks out lost sinners so that they can "find" Him. He has put evidence of His power in this world, but most importantly, He's put evidence of His love in His Means of Grace. He has left us with a carefully preserved record of His grace and goodness in the Bible. He's left us with the clear account of His Son's life lived for us, His Son's death died for us, His Son's punishment paid for us, and His Son's resurrection accomplished for us. He has left us with the historical and factual story of His

forgiveness for our sins. And when that gospel message is shared, God lets Himself be found.

In the last verses of today's text, He says, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts." In other words, God's ways are mysterious. The workers in today's Gospel lesson sure thought it was a mystery why all of them got paid the same regardless of how many hours they worked. Those who worked all day for the same agreed-upon wage thought this was very unfair! This parable reminds us though that eternal life is the reward, really the gift of God. And it's given to all who receive Him in faith.

This may not seem fair, but remember, God's ways are above our ways, and His thoughts are above our thoughts. And that's good thing, a very good thing! Remember, if we think God is being unfair by giving the same gift of eternal life to someone who first believes on their death-bed as to the one who was baptized as a child and remained in the faith throughout his or her life, we must ask ourselves what is it about our ways, that is, the way we live our lives, that has earned anything good from God? Remember what Isaiah said about people's ways in verse seven: "Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts." Maybe someone has been a Christian longer than somebody else. Maybe one person has done more good things in his or her lifetime than another. But God's standard isn't how much you've tried. God's standard is perfection, and when we measure up our ways and our thoughts with God's standard, we quickly see that our wicked ways and evil thoughts wind us up in hell.

What about God's ways? God doesn't reward people with heaven because they work so hard and do such a great job. The reward God gives is completely undeserved, but it's received by faith in Jesus' atoning work on the cross. Those are God's ways, the ways Isaiah described in verse seven. "Let him turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon." God's standard is perfection. Through faith alone in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, God credits Jesus' perfection to us. God's mysterious and wonderful ways and thoughts lead to forgiveness that has opened the gates of paradise to you and me.

The way God operates may seem like a mystery to us, but the Good News of God's love for us in Jesus is no mystery. It's revealed right here in His Word and in His Sacraments. Through you, me and many others, God will reveal that Word to the world. And by God's grace many more will come to believe it, too!

Thanks be to God who seeks and saves the lost. Thanks be to our God who seeks and saves us! Amen!