

Where All our Needs are Met

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[0 : 0 0] Isaiah chapter 55 and reading once again at verse 6. Seek the Lord while he may be found. Call upon him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts. Let him return to the Lord that he may have compassion on him and to our God for he will abundantly pardon.

And we're looking at these verses but also taking in some of the rest of the chapter especially the following verses down to the end of the chapter. Some people mistakenly believe that because Jesus died that itself ensures that they will be saved.

But that is to really mistake or to confuse the objective procuring of our salvation with our subjective acceptance of it.

The objective that is to say something that happened out with us out with our persons out with our experience. That objective accomplishing of salvation is in the work of Jesus Christ especially his death on the cross and his resurrection.

That is the objective accomplishment or procuring or obtaining of salvation for sinners like you and I. That itself, the fact that that has taken place does not actually mean that I inevitably will be saved.

[1 : 4 5] There has to be a subjective acceptance of that objective accomplishment.

And as Christ is presenting himself to us in the gospel, in the scriptures, that is what we are called upon to do. We are informed about the objective in terms of Christ's work, that accomplishment of salvation.

We are called by God and we are urged by God to actually give acceptance to this Savior for ourselves.

And it's interesting if you come to these chapters in Isaiah, we're all I'm sure familiar with chapter 53, which is, as the New Testament also makes clear, a chapter that has to do with the sufferings of Christ and the way that he gave himself to the sufferings described and to death for his people.

And then that's followed, or that in a sense continues into chapter 54 as well. You could call that the objective accomplishment of our salvation. But it's followed by this chapter 55 where we have these wonderful invitations and these urgent appeals by God to come and make for ourselves use of that accomplishment.

[3 : 1 0] Receive for ourselves. Come to what God has actually provided for us in that accomplishment of his salvation in Christ. And as you can see at the beginning of the chapter, we're not really going to go in any detail into the first part of the chapter, although it is very much a unit in itself, the whole chapter is that.

But here we are at the beginning of the chapter and you're very much aware that God is actually illustrating what is available to us by speaking of it in terms of a very rich banquet, the best that God, in fact, could provide.

And that banquet is actually ready. There's nothing else that needs to be done to be placed on that table for there to be spiritual food for us to enjoy and to partake of and to benefit from.

Come, he says, to the waters. Come, he that has no money. It doesn't matter. We don't need to pay for this. We don't need to actually think of it as something we contribute to. It's been done for us.

Come and buy and eat. Come buy wine and milk. That which is exhilarating and that which is substantial. It's all there. The banquet contains every single thing that you and I could possibly want and possibly need, we should say.

[4 : 26] Because this is where all our needs are met. In God's objective accomplishment of our salvation in Christ. And that's why he makes this appeal.

And it's interesting, isn't it? God, throughout the Bible, does this. That's why it's such a precious thing for us to know this Bible. Because he doesn't just throw things at us and then tell us to work it out.

He doesn't just give us a jumble of information and then we have to try and work where we are with that. He doesn't just even bring us appeals or urge us to come and believe him.

He tells us why. He gives us reasons why he asks us and commands us to do certain things. You see, he's saying here, come and buy this. Come to this banquet.

Come and partake of all that he has done. Because why do you spend your money for that which is not bread and your labor for that which it does not satisfy?

[5 : 22] Listen diligently to me and eat what is good and delight yourselves in rich food. You see, he's presenting his own reasoning, his own argument, along with the appeal.

That's the great thing about God. He doesn't leave you in the dark. He gives this appeal and invitation, but then he accompanies it with all of these reasonings as to why this is something that is absolutely indispensable for us.

And he moves on then, of course, and if you do so, he says, incline your ear and come listen. And, of course, he's appealing, of course, through Isaiah to the people of Israel or Judah in Isaiah's day.

What had they done? What were they spending their time on? What were their energies going into? It was idolatry. They had actually gone to the gods of the Canaanites, to these false idols, false gods, these idols.

And that's why he's saying, why do you spend your money for that which does not satisfy? That which cannot benefit you but harms you. Listen diligently to me.

[6 : 29] Come to me and hear that your soul may live. And he says, I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David. Why is David's name mentioned today?

What does that mean? God is going to make an everlasting covenant, and that covenant is, in fact, his sure love for David. David's been long since dead by the time Isaiah came to write this.

Of course, what it means is that all the way through the Old Testament, you have this wonderful messianic strand of expectancy. The expectancy of a coming king greater than David, of whom David is a figure, or a type, or a shadow, or, if you like, an image.

And that figure in the New Testament happens to be Jesus. I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David.

I will make him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander to the peoples. That is not fulfilled in any of the kings in the Old Testament, but it is amply fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ.

[7 : 39] That is who he is tonight, a leader and a commander and a witness to us as a people, a witness of God's steadfast love. And the promises of life that are in the gospel are attached to the person of God's Son, Jesus Christ.

That is what he is saying. I will make with you this covenant. I will enter into a bond with you. And that bond will consist of all that I have promised to the Savior himself that will be given to my people when they come to me.

That is the introduction. But then you see, when he is inviting us to come, we must not think that he will have us to come unconditionally. He is not saying to us, come as you are so that you can stay as you are.

Because that is the kind of version of Christianity that sometimes you find being put about today. That Christianity is not really about any change in a person's life.

And that we are not in fact at all to think of Christianity as in any way going to interfere with other faiths or other beliefs or other types of religions in order to try and convert them in order that they become Christians and actually begin to follow Christ.

[9 : 01] In our day, that is actually frowned upon. It is looked down upon. But you don't find that in the Bible. What it says is that the nations will come to you because of the Lord your God and of the Holy One of Israel.

That's God. And what God is saying to us tonight, and that's what the gospel always presents to us, is yes, God is saying, come to me.

Come to this banquet. Come to my table. Come to me. Come to me. But you are not to come thinking that you are going to stay as you are, that your life is not going to be changed.

In fact, what he is saying is come so that you will know this change that brings all these benefits into your life. That was Christ's word to Nicodemus, wasn't he?

John chapter 3, a man who was a teacher in Israel. He knew the Old Testament. He knew the scriptures. But he wasn't born again. He hadn't been changed in his own heart. And he was puzzled about this.

[10 : 03] And Jesus took him through. In his thoughts, he took him through the need to be born again and how that rebirth is from above. It's from the Spirit of God.

And so, just recently, a drawing or a cartoon of a lot of people gathered in front of a rostrum where somebody was portrayed there as saying to the people, how many people here want change?

And all the hands of those people in the audience were up. And there was another almost identical drawing underneath it where the speaker was saying, not how many people want change, but how many people want to be changed.

And there were no hands up. And that's the difference. A lot of people clamor for change. They want the church to change. They want to change the gospel.

They want to change so many things in society. They want all sorts of changes. You ask them, do you want to change? Do you want to be changed? No. I want to stay the way I am. I want to insist on being the person I am.

[11 : 09] Well, you can't if you're going to be a Christian. This is what he's saying. You have to come with repentance, in repentance, which is what verse 6 following is really about.

The invitation is very genuine. It's very open. It's free. It's inviting us to this fullness of blessing that is in Christ on the table as the banquet is portrayed.

But he's also saying you can't come. And just imagine that it's going to mean everything about you is going to stay the same. No, he says, seek the Lord.

Call upon him. Let the wicked forsake his way. Let the unrighteous man his thoughts. Let him return to the Lord. So here's God's call to repent, first of all, in verses 6 and 7.

And the first part of that is really seek the Lord. Seek the Lord. Now, that's not to do with seeking something as if it were lost and you don't know where it is.

[12 : 09] You use that word seeking. Sometimes when you've lost something, you go around the house seeking it. Your car keys, your door keys, your van car, whatever it is. You've lost it. You're going around.

You don't know where you left it. So you go around seeking it. That's not the kind of seeking that he's setting out here for us at all. Seek the Lord means go to the one you know is there.

You know where he is. And the seeking that he's speaking of here to the people of Judah is really a seeking that will involve them in ceasing to do what they're doing, in ceasing to look where they're looking for satisfaction, and going to the one they know as God.

Seek the Lord. You know where he is. He's in the gospel. He's in the gospel as God presents it to us. He's in the scriptures.

He's in the preaching of the gospel. He's in your reading of the word. And when he says come, he says come, seek the Lord. Look for him there.

[13 : 16] Go to him where he is. And not as if you didn't know where he is to be found. And you see, seek the Lord while he may be found.

Why is he adding that? What importance does that have tonight in our thinking when God is inviting us to come to him and to seek him and to come with repentance and turning from our own ways into his?

Why is he saying while he may be found? Why is there a sense of urgency? Because the time is short. That's why. God is not giving us an indefinite time to our lives when this is just going to go on for us and we're going to be seeking the Lord.

He's saying seek the Lord while he may be found. While you have the opportunity. While you have the advantages you have. While everything as it is in a way of having God placed before you in a way that may be found by you.

Seek him while he may be found. In other words, Isaiah is putting before the people of Judah the need to really think about this seriously and urgently.

[14 : 26] And not to say to themselves, well that's alright but I can relax for a while yet. I've still got my life to live and things will work out alright. No, he's saying seek the Lord while he may be found.

We don't know where we'll be tomorrow. We don't know if we'll have the kind of mind we have tonight to read the scriptures.

Something might indeed come into our lot too. That unexpectedly takes away our faculties. Seek him while he is to be found.

You know, if Jesus is worth following, then he's worth following now. If you say about Jesus Christ that he is indeed worth having as a savior, well why would you wait for any further time before you have him as a savior?

If he is indeed the best thing that God could have provided for us, salvation in him, then surely you and I need that now. Seek him while he may be found.

[15 : 35] And then he goes and says, call upon him while he is near. While he is near. And that is an interesting phrase in itself.

Why does he say call upon him while he is near? These people are actually pretty far away from God actually. They've gone after these idols of the Canaanites and yet here is Isaiah saying, call upon him while he is near.

And when you translate that into spiritual meaning, it really is God's appeal through Isaiah himself as it's reaching these people. God has drawn near to them.

God has given them this servant, this prophet, in order to bring his own mind and his own will and his own word to them. He's near to them in that. And while he is near, call upon him while he is near.

While he is close. And indeed there is actually another nuance or shade of meaning to this word near.

[16 : 37] Because in the Old Testament it is sometimes used in the sense of somebody who is closely related to someone else. A kinsman. And as you know, that's something that is associated with Jesus as our Savior.

He has come near to us in the sense that he is so near as to become one of us by taking our human nature. You know, but really what God is saying through this to us is, not so much that Jesus has done this, that he has done this in Jesus, but that in the offer of the gospel, in the invitation of God, in his appeal to come to him, to repent, to turn from whatever is keeping us back and to come to God, what he is really saying effectively is, God is waiting to become your nearest relative and dearest friend.

Who is your dearest friend tonight? Who is your nearest relative? Well, God is waiting to be nearer to you than any of that.

Because his nearness in salvation is a nearness where he himself will become united to us, bonded to us.

I will make with you a covenant, even my steadfast love for David, my sure love for David. Can you break God's love? Can it come to an end?

[18 : 09] Is there something that's going to displace it in the way that his people come to enjoy it in this covenant? No. And so that's another argument, really, in a sense that God is using.

Call upon him while he's near. In the gospel tonight he's saying, Will you not be my dearest friend? Will you not be my nearest relative?

Do you not want to have me as your best companion? As the one who will never leave you? Who will never forsake you? Who will uphold you through all your problems, even though he won't take all of them away?

Who will show you his love from day to day? Who will make you increasingly wise as to the things of salvation and of this life and of the life to come?

Call upon him while he is near. And then he says, Forsake sin. Not only seeking the Lord and doing so, but forsaking sin.

[19 : 12] That's why we're saying this is really about repentance. Because coming to the Lord and coming to draw near to him and to call upon him while he's near is actually something that involves us forsaking our way.

Now notice what he's saying. Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts. And you might say, but that's little to do with me. I've never been really wicked. That's because we tend to think of the word wicked as it's usually more commonly used in our language today.

as describing something that has really been a gruesome crime of some kind. Somebody who is obviously out and out wicked in their lives. But actually this word wicked, more than here, is used in the Bible so frequently.

And it has as part of its essential meaning, somebody who is guilty before the law. Not just somebody who's committed some great crime or some atrocity.

You don't have to have done anything like that in order to be described as wicked. As I am born a sinful human being, I am wicked because I am guilty before the law of God.

[20 : 31] I am guilty of breaking that law, of not measuring up to that law. And what he's saying is really applicable to every single one of us.

Because we cannot actually tonight say, I've never been wicked. We are all wicked. In this biblical sense of it. And what he's saying is, let that wicked forsake his way.

And the unrighteous man, he's talking about the same person, wickedness, unrighteousness, that's what we are as sinners. Let him forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts. In other words, the whole life and lifestyle of the person that he's talking about is something that he needs to turn from and she needs to turn from.

He's talking about his way, that's his way of life, his way of living, talking about his thoughts, that's his inward thoughts, his inward thoughts, his attitude. Everything is there. The inward attitude in the mind and the heart, and there's the outward life that corresponds to that.

Well, he says, let them forsake that way and the unrighteous man his thoughts. Let him return to the Lord that he may have compassion on him and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

[21 : 47] In other words, he's really, again, saying to us that he's addressing people who are going in the opposite direction. And you know, sometimes when people tell you life really feels good, and you feel like saying to them, well, it may feel good outwardly, but actually if you're not saved, you're going away in the opposite direction from what really is designed for your good.

Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts and let him return to the Lord. Let him turn round again. That's repentance. And return to the Lord so that he may have compassion on him and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

Well, there's so much in these verses, verses in that verse itself, isn't it? He will have compassion on him. He may have compassion, that he may have compassion on him and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

There's the genuine, personal nearness of God, our God. Our God is what the prophet calls him. The one who has come into our possession, if you like, through his own grace that we can call out God.

He is ours. He has made himself ours. But so that we, he may have compassion on us. I think I've mentioned this previously, that this word in the Old Testament is a word that's very closely related to the word for the womb, where a child is conceived and develops.

[23 : 22] And you know that Isaiah himself uses that in chapter 49 and that very famous statement, where he again is, what God is saying of his own love, that he himself, in fact, has that deep love for them.

He says, can a woman forget the child of her womb, that she should not have compassion on the child or on the fruit of her womb? Yes, he says, they may forget, but I will not forget you.

There's that incredibly strong bond between a woman and a child that she has carried in her womb. Incredibly strong.

Unbreakably strong. And yet God is saying, my love is stronger than that, than even that. I will never forget them, my people.

There is no forgetfulness in the love of God. No lapses in the love of God. No turnings in the love of God. No shady areas in the love of God.

[24 : 44] That he may have compassion on him is why we come to him. That he may have compassion on us. And to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

The pardon that he brings is abundant. It's full, it's replete. It's really part of the argument again. When we come to God, just go back to the illustration of the banquet at the beginning of the chapter.

When you come to that banquet, you're not coming to a table that's sparsely set out with just a few items of food on it. And you're not coming to something that's just got little bits and pieces here and there which really will not satisfy you.

Just the crumbs, the leftover or something. It's an abundant pardon. It's a pardon that covers all our sins. That covers all its guilt.

A pardon that actually puts it out of sight. As Matthew Henry once put it, when we come to God with our sin and repentance, when we lay them out before God in our repentance, he puts them behind his back in his pardon.

[25 : 53] That's our God who will abundantly pardon. You can't, it's so full, this salvation, this pardon, you can't describe it. Even the prophet here is using words where literally what he's saying is he will add pardon to pardon.

He will go on pardoning. That doesn't make us complacent, but it does present God in all the fullness of his grace.

He will abundantly pardon. That's his call to repent and he confirms that call in the remainder of the chapter. I'm going to go over this pretty quickly, but they are important details nonetheless.

It's really God in support, if you like. He's saying, well, this is how I'm guaranteeing what I'm setting out to you in my call to come to know me. I'm setting out my arguments, my guarantee, if you like, in the support of what I'm saying in my appeal to you.

And what does he say? Well, he says, first of all, he tells us what he's like himself. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are my ways your ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

[27 : 06] You know, when you think about it, everything that's gone before that, as we've very briefly gone over it, really should force from our minds this question, how can that be?

How can this God, who is in Isaiah's prophecy more than anywhere else in the Old Testament, presented as the Holy One, how can this Holy God, this perfect God, who really hates sin, how can he possibly abundantly pardon me, the sinner?

And God answers to him and says, because I'm not like you. My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are my ways your ways, declares the Lord.

If he were like us, he wouldn't pardon. If he were the way we are so often, he would not have compassion. But he says, that's not how I am.

And there's no better place to see that than in another prophecy, the prophecy of Hosea, where you find in Hosea, chapter, Hosea chapter 11, God is again there through Hosea speaking to Israel this time, and he's really saying, my people are bent on turning away from me.

[28 : 27] Really the same as what Isaiah is saying in his day. And so the thought comes, what's God going to do with them? Surely God's just going to get rid of them and start somewhere else.

And then he says, how can I give you up? How can I hand you over, O Israel? How can I make you like Adma?

How can I treat you like Zeboam? These were two cities, along with Sodom and Gomorrah, that were caught up in the deluge of God's judgment, as you find it in Genesis. What he's saying is, how can I do that?

How can I give you over to that? How can I destroy you? How can I give you up? Your sin deserves it, but how can I do it? No, he says, I will not. My heart recoils within me.

My compassion grows warm and tender. I will not execute my burning anger. I will not again destroy Ephraim. Why not? For I am God and not a man.

[29 : 30] In other words, God is saying, if I were a man, this is what would happen. But I am God and not a man. The Holy One in your midst, and I will not come in wrath. What a remarkable statement.

You expect that the Holy One in their midst would come in his wrath. That's because it's according to our thinking that we think. But what he's saying is, I will not do it.

Because I am God. Because I am compassionate. Because I love to pardon. Because forgiveness gives me delight.

What is God like? That's reinforcing his call to come to him. And also, what God's word is like. Verses 10 and 11. Let's just briefly look at that.

The rain that comes down from heaven and waters the earth, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth. It shall not return to me empty. In other words, how is God going to accomplish this?

[30 : 29] Do we need some spectacular miracle in order to bring this about in our lives? That God will do a saving work in our hearts? No, Isaiah is saying to the people then, and he's saying it to us through the gospel.

Just like the rain comes down from above, so the word of God is productive. God actually sends it forth. That's why we can say with certainty tonight that while you're hearing a human voice in this pulpit, it's God who's speaking to you through that voice and through this gospel, through this preaching, through this word of God, it's God who's speaking to you and saying, my word shall not return to me empty.

It will accomplish whatever I send it forth to. You see, in other words, you really come to the conclusion here very rightly that if that's the case and if God's word is like that, then God's word is dependable and God himself is dependable, then you can say rightly, well, I can act on the fact that God is saying here, I give you my word.

When somebody says that to you, if I were to say that to you, that's not infallibly going to be the case. That doesn't mean that when I say, yes, I promise I will do that, I give you my word, but as a fallible human being, I could end up breaking that word and not actually fulfilling my promise.

And you could be the same. We all know that that's the case with us as human beings. But when God is saying, I give you my word, he's not going to be at all short of fulfilling that.

[32 : 15] You must never think that it's not going to come to pass when God says it will. That God is not going to be true to his promise to make with you this wonderful covenant in Jesus Christ as you come to him.

It's God's productive word. And he finishes by pointing out what the future holds.

And it's really the language of Exodus there in verse 12. You shall go out in joy and be led forth in peace. The mountains and the hills before you shall break into singing. There you see is Isaiah pointing the people back to the Exodus from Egypt where they began on their journey as a people following the Lord with the Lord as their Savior.

That's the great illustration of salvation in the Old Testament. God bringing the people out of the darkness and the bondage of Egypt and into a relationship with himself and on towards the promised land and into the land of Canaan.

And that's the language that he extends to us in the promises of the gospel. That's where the Lord takes us out from and where he takes us into.

[33 : 29] Out of sin and darkness. Out of all of those things that can never give satisfaction where we're turned in on ourselves. And he leads us so that we come to know himself.

You see instead of the thorn shall come up the cupress. Instead of the briar shall come up the myrtle. These are all descriptions for us in the Old Testament that are very meaningful.

The thorn and the briar are often used in the Old Testament where God speaks of his judgment. Where the creation itself comes under his judgment and where there's a symbol of his spiritual judgment when you see the thorn and the briar as a land that's given over to go wild.

But God is turning that, you see. He's saying where that exists. Where a life is shriveled up and dead spiritually and morally. What God is saying is, you come to me and I'll make you evergreen.

Isn't it interesting the two trees that he's chosen there, the cupress and the myrtle, they're evergreen. They don't fade. They don't wither away in their foliage.

[34 : 46] So it's a complete change. The briar and the thorn. God is saying, I can change that. I change these things. I change what's dead. I bring what's dead to life.

And what cannot give satisfaction, I bring you to what will and what will give you lasting satisfaction. And what will glorify his own name. And you know, that's really one of the things that we often maybe think about.

And perhaps we're guilty of this in presenting the gospel as well and preaching it. That it's really all about satisfaction or mainly about receiving satisfaction for our souls. Now, don't get me wrong, that's a hugely important element.

And God is saying, yes, you will have satisfaction. Of course, when you come to this banquet, you're going to be taking things which will satisfy your soul. But there's something more important.

And that is the purpose for which we were created. Which is to glorify God. Why does he call us tonight to come to him? Why does he invite us to this banquet?

[35 : 49] Yes, so that we can get satisfaction, so that we will be saved, that we'll know that in our own experience. But he's saying, God is saying, I want you to fulfill the very end and purpose for which I created you.

bring glory to me. Death does not bring glory to me, he's saying. The thorn and the briar brings no glory to me. That's to do with dying, with death, with sin, with penalty, with curse.

My glory is in the evergreen of salvation, of life. And that's where he's saying he will bring us to as we come to him.

And it will be for a memorial, for a memorial, an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off. And in summary, you could say that's really where in the old times, in ancient days, kings would set up a column, or a pillar, or a stella, as it's known, in order to commemorate some famous victory.

And they wanted people and generations to come to read that, and to read about them and their victories. Well, this is really saying, well, God is about that, but in a much more important way.

[37 : 02] God sets up a monument to himself. Where? In his redeemed people. A redeemed people. A transformed people.

In a transformed creation. That's God's great monument. That's his memorial. That's where he makes a name for himself. That's what he's calling us to share in, to partake of.

Come. Listen. Seek. Forsake. Return. Enter into this great state of relationship with God.

Accept. If you haven't already, take all the arguments God is giving in support of his call and share in this wonderful banquet that will be crowned in the marriage supper of Jesus, the Lamb.

May he bless his word to us. Lord, our God, we pray that you would grant us thankful hearts as we receive again of the gospel and all that it offers to us.

[38 : 22] in the Savior, Jesus Christ. We thank you for the fullness of blessing that is promised to us in him and for the fullness of life that we come into possession of as we come to you through him.

Blessed to us, we pray your word again this evening and grant that your blessing may follow us into these days to come and all for Jesus' sake. Amen. Let's now conclude by singing in Psalm 119, 119, on page 166, and that's verses 145 to 152, and we're singing to the tune Eventide.

I call with all my heart, Lord, answer me, and then all your decrees I will obey. I cry aloud to you, Lord, save my life, and I will keep your statutes every day.

That's this section 19 of Psalm 119, on page 166, verse 145, I call with all my heart. Amen.

I call with all my heart, Lord, answer me, and then all your decrees I will obey.

[39 : 49] I cry aloud to you, Lord, save my life, and I will keep your statutes every day.

day. I rise before God and cry for help.

All I have sent my hope upon your word, I stay away through through the hours of night, reflecting on your promises, O Lord.

Lord, Lord, in your loving kindness hear my voice, and in your justice serve and keep my life.

life. For those who did great are your holy love, I'll approach with schemes of wickedness and strife.

[41 : 37] life. Yet you are near to those who seek you, Lord, all your problems are true and ever should.

true. Yes, from your sanctuaries of earth, all I learn, that you have made them always to endure.

I'll go to the main door this evening. Now, may the grace of the Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you now and evermore.

Amen.