

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
www.lutheranlccf.org
First Sunday after Epiphany, January 12, 2014

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 382, 37:1-2, 279, 335, 32.

Lessons: Psalm 14, Titus 2:11-3:8, Luke 19:1-10.

Sermon Text: Titus 3:4-7.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehltritt

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Some years ago a fast food chain introduced a catchy advertising phrase “You deserve a break today”. Se we might ask the question ‘don’t we “deserve” a lot of things?’ Many think that Americans are living in an “entitlement” society – where most people think they are entitled to lots of things. In one sense this means that people want things they don’t have to work for or pay for. We want someone else to provide health care, retirement income, sometimes even food, shelter, and the list could go on and on – things that we don’t have to provide for ourselves. Look at your own community and think about what kinds of things we want someone else to pay for. Without making this a political speech, I want to remind you that we might remember there was a time when most people thought that government was there to provide us with things that we needed that we couldn’t provide individually, things like roads and national defense. But many today have concluded that they want someone else to provide things for us that aren’t needs, but just about everything we want. Isn’t it human nature to want someone else to provide for us?

But what do we really deserve? Because this is a sermon, you can expect that you are going to hear about what you really deserve from God and about what you don’t deserve from God. We must confess to God, as did Jacob when he was afraid to meet with his brother Esau, whom he had deceived and from whom he had stolen the birthright, ***"I am unworthy of all the kindness and faithfulness you have shown your servant. I had only my staff when I crossed this Jordan, but now I have become two groups."*** (Genesis 32:10) You may remember the words from the King James Version: ***"I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies."*** (Genesis 32:10)

What we really deserve from God is earthly death, and eternal death and damnation. After all, that is what God threatened to Adam and Eve if they disobeyed him in Eden. And they did disobey him. Since that time, death is the only thing we have “deserved” from God.

And what is it that we don’t deserve? We don’t deserve everything God has done for us and provided for us, the earthly, material possessions, honor, and life we have on earth and the promise of eternal life God has given to us and to all who believe in him as Savior. So we realize that God really does provide everything for us, even though we don’t deserve any of it. But strangely, many humans don’t want to accept what God provides when it comes to eternal salvation. They’d prefer to try to earn it themselves, which they just cannot do.

Today let’s remember

WHY GOD SAVED YOU

1. **God saved us because of his mercy, love, and kindness.**
2. **He did this so that because we have *“been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.”***

The first two chapters of this letter and the verses right before our text are quite a catalog of sins and wickedness. Paul, who wrote this letter to Titus, especially encouraging him to preach the word of God in its

truth and purity, both law and gospel, has made it clear that human beings are sinful. Just about every sin is identified up till now in this letter. But as we read it, it seems that the emphasis is really on sins that are within one, not necessarily the open public sins that we see so plainly – especially, our self-righteous pride thinks, in others in the world. You know, the old “not me!” excuse?

Much of what Paul has written is from a pastoral approach, that is, Paul is telling Titus as a pastor to admonish people as a very important part of his calling. But in the verses immediately before our text he says ***"At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another."*** (Titus 3:3)

Yes, he says we, all people, even Christians, have this kind of sinful nature. Foolish disobedience to God and to all in authority. All humans have been deceived and enslaved by all kinds of wickedness. We were immersed in sin and transgression and iniquity. We had no other choice, for we were slaves of sin. He speaks of being hated by mankind and, he says, hating one another. Hate, of course, is probably the most natural human emotion, right along with selfishness. Just as we hate others and do and say all the things associated with hate, so we are hated by others. So you see Paul has his finger on the pulse of humanity. He knows people. He knows us, for he was a sinner just like all of us. He knows all men are sinful and unclean before God. He knows about the thoughts of even your heart, and my heart.

Then he tells us ***"But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy."***

Paul speaks of the kindness and love of God our Savior. This word translated kindness also is properly translated goodness and gentleness and in every case except one in the New Testament it refers to a characteristic or to attributes of God, and even that one place is a comparison to the goodness of God in pointing out that no man does good, no not one. Paul speaks of both Jews and Gentiles in these words: ***"there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one."*** (Romans 3:11-12) So no one is capable, by nature, of doing the kind of goodness that God does.

The word “love” here is the only use of this specific Greek word in the New Testament, and is the root of the word philanthropy, literally love of mankind, and has come to be used of the good things that humans do for one another. But notice that Paul is speaking of the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward all mankind. This comes from God ***"our Savior."***

"But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us." Of course at this season of the year, Epiphany, following the celebration of the birth of Christ, we can certainly think of the physical appearing of God our Savior on earth because God our Savior came down to earth and was born of a woman. In this Epiphany season we especially celebrate the appearance, the revelation of Jesus Christ to Gentiles so that he might become our Savior, and might be recognized as the Savior of all mankind.

This of course is our God – the true God, who is our Savior. His appearance came through being born a human, born of a woman in the most humble circumstances.

But notice what God did with his appearance. ***"He saved us."*** Jesus saved us. This was his mission. That is what he came to earth to do. To save us. But not only to save us gathered together here right now, but also to save all mankind. And that message of salvation has been committed unto us to give to the world. Paul writes to the Corinthians about ***"God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation."*** (2 Corinthians 5:18-19)

Because Paul has been talking of sin and the wickedness of all mankind, the words are especially meaningful as he says ***"he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy."***

We didn't deserve it. All humankind – every one of us – didn't deserve God's goodness and mercy and kindness and love. We, after all, are sinners and will always be sinners as long as we live on earth. It is only when we get to heaven that we will be totally, completely free from all sin. But we are redeemed sinners, and as such, the Holy Spirit has worked sanctification in us that we may serve our God and fellow mankind. We, as God's children, have the ability to serve him. We, as God's children, have the ability to fight and overcome sin and the devil in our daily lives. And it is all God's doing.

“He saved us.” God saved us, redeemed us, rescued us, bought us back “from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver but with his holy, precious blood and with his innocent suffering and death” as we confess in the Second Article of the creed.

He did this ***“because of his mercy,”*** his compassion, his divine caring for us. We are reminded of His undeserved love and mercy. This points back to the words ***“the kindness and love of God.”*** The idea is repeated because of its importance.

Then Paul reminds us how it is that God saved us. We didn’t and can’t earn it ourselves. ***“He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior.”***

Paul is here talking about something that God does, not something that mankind does or ever could do by himself. Paul here is talking about baptism, which includes ***“renewal by the Holy Spirit.”***

You know what the word renewal means. It means made new. It means made complete, whole and here it even means made perfect again.

This happened because God gave us ***“the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior.”*** God poured out the Holy Spirit, not just a little sprinkling.

So God generously poured out on us his salvation, rebirth, renewal, and that means life, not death. And then the Word of God tells us what will happen to us: ***“so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.”***

Now I hope you remember the picture of justification. To justify means to declare not guilty. Justification is the picture of a judge announcing complete forgiveness to one who is really, truly guilty. A criminal who has committed murder cannot expect leniency as he stands condemned before the judge. He deserves to be punished. So it is with the sinner as he stands in God’s sight. Isaiah describes Israel’s sinfulness, which is the same as our sinfulness today. Such sinners deserve punishment. Listen to how Isaiah condemns mankind: ***“Ah, sinful nation, a people loaded with guilt, a brood of evildoers, children given to corruption! They have forsaken the LORD; they have spurned the Holy One of Israel and turned their backs on him.”*** (Isaiah 1:4) But in spite of their sins, God does not condemn these sinners to everlasting damnation but gives them perfect righteousness by faith in Christ Jesus. God puts the robe of Jesus’ perfection over them and declares them “not guilty”. This is the amazing declaration of God to all sinners. It is like a judge who is looking at you when you know you are guilty of the charges brought against you. Then the judge looks at his papers, which confirm your guilt, and then declares you NOT GUILTY. It is as if he has mixed up papers, and read the verdict to you that he should have given to someone else. You are guilty, and every fact clearly points to that. God had really given you the verdict someone else deserves. He has given you the verdict his only-begotten Son deserved and earned by his perfect life. He has not mixed up the papers. That is exactly what God intends to do and intended to do from eternity!

And, because God has declared us “not guilty”, Paul assures us that ***“we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.”*** Believers will inherit eternal life. Isaiah gives us this picture of what God does to our sins: ***“Come now, let us reason together,’ says the LORD. ‘Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.’”*** (Isaiah 1:18)

This has come to you, and to all who believe and have been baptized. Forget what you think you deserve. Although we are by nature sinful and unclean and daily sin against God by thought, word, and deed, we receive the joy of forgiveness which God’s declaration gives us. We can inherit; we will inherit eternal life because of what God did for us.

This eternal life is yours simply by believing it! You have been declared “not guilty” by the eternal judge of all! May you always rejoice in that verdict of God! Amen.