

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Second Sunday in Advent, December 6, 2015

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)
Hymns: 20, 56:2, 69:1-4, 385:1-4, 457.
Lessons: Psalm 32, Hebrews 4:15-5:10, Luke 18:35-43.
Sermon Text: Romans 15:8-9.
Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehltrittter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Last Sunday you heard about one of Jesus' two advents, or coming to earth. He came to be born as a human to live, to suffer, and to die as a human. That was a physical coming to earth.

Today we look at how Jesus comes into our hearts and lives showing his love and mercy and grace.

JESUS COMES IN MERCY

- 1. "Jesus comes again in mercy When our hearts are bowed with care;"**
- 2. "Jesus comes again in answer To an earnest, heartfelt prayer."**

We often speak of God's "grace", meaning his undeserved love and mercy. Love and mercy are just some of God's attributes, his characteristics, and they are really synonymous.

All of the following dictionary definitions of "mercy" certainly apply to God. His mercy is his compassion, his disposition to be kind and forgiving. "Mercy" includes God's relief in all kinds of troubles. It is his compassionate or kindly forbearance shown toward an offender, toward mankind.

And do we need to talk much about who God's enemies are, who has offended him and sinned against him? Of course we must start with Satan and then list all Satan's angels. But we must also include ourselves as we are by nature, meaning our Old Man, our sinful flesh.

Every Sunday we confess our sins before God at the beginning of the service. Yes, we sin daily and much, and indeed, deserve nothing but punishment for our sins. But God is merciful and forgives our sins. After all, he heaped them on his one and only Son Jesus Christ, and made him pay the price for our wrong-doing.

And that is the reason God shows mercy to us, sinful mankind.

When we speak of God's mercy, we especially mean God's undeserved attitudes and acts of his kindness and love toward us. The glossary in the catechism we are now using defines mercy as God's kindness in not punishing sinners as they deserve by providing a Savior instead. We often use mercy as a synonym or explanation for God's grace. And our catechism book defines grace as God's undeserved love that provides free forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation for all people.

God's mercy is something that we recognize as a spiritual gift, and we might also say an emotional gift rather than a physical gift. It is something that we hear about and then often it strikes our hearts in an emotional way and makes us realize and even feel that our sins are forgiven and that we are at peace with God.

We are speaking of God's mercy toward us, not mercy we might show to someone else. Any mercy we show to others would be a fruit of faith, something we do in the fear, love, and trust of God. We love others only because God first loved us.

The hymn writer today especially emphasizes that Jesus comes with his mercy "when our hearts are bowed with care", and "comes again in answer to an earnest, heartfelt prayer."

Let's look first at the idea that Jesus comes in mercy when we are burdened with troubles and distress.

God cares for us, and wants to give relief to us for the cares and troubles that distress us. Peter, speaking by inspiration of God, encourages us to "*Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he*

may exalt you in due time: Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you." (1 Peter 5:6-7 KJV) In another translation that reads *"Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you."* (NIV)

Jesus comes to us through his Word, the Bible. Again and again in the Scriptures we find God with his mercy just waiting to come to us.

The King James Version of the Bible uses the word "mercy" about 275 times, about 215 in the Old Testament and about 60 in the New Testament. When speaking of the mercy of God, the New Testament is very consistent in presenting it as an undeserved love and goodness. Repeatedly in the Gospels people come to Jesus begging mercy for some kind of ailment, and he answers such requests by healing them again and again. Without examining all the Old Testament references, a sampling shows that they, too, use the word to suggest that mercy is something that those who approach God asking for it realize that it is undeserved. That attitude shows a knowledge of one's sin, which we learn from God's Law.

We know what we deserve from God. We deserve temporal death and eternal damnation. But God doesn't give us what we deserve. He gives us what he wants to give us in his mercy. He offers to mankind his eternal goodness, which is received and accepted through faith, simply by believing it. There is nothing we can do to earn God's eternal goodness. That is what makes the word "mercy" and the idea of God's mercy so great. We know we don't deserve any of God's goodness. But he gives it to us anyway, because he covers us with the perfection of Jesus, his Son and forgives our sins.

Scripture again and again speaks of God's mercy. The very first use of the word "mercy" is Lot thanking God for sparing his life. God speaks of the cover of the ark of the covenant, which contained the Law of God as a mercy seat, in that way covering over the sins of men which the Law shows.

The Psalms are especially full of talking about God's mercy. When that book of the Bible speaks of God's mercy, we find men sometimes are pleading with God to come and help them. For example, David admits to God in our Old Testament lesson: *"I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin."* (Psalms 32:5 KJV) Did you notice how the forgiveness of sins was right there waiting for his repentance? Two verses later David rejoices with these words: *"Thou art my hiding place; thou shalt preserve me from trouble; thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance."* (Psalms 32:7 KJV)

Old Testament prophets show God's mercy. For example, we could point to Isaiah, and especially in chapters 40 through the end of his book he shows the mercy of God to his undeserving people.

In the Gospels Jesus often shows mercy by healing people of illnesses. The way that many of those people come to Jesus pleading for mercy emphasizes their powerlessness to do anything about what is troubling them. Jesus then presents his mercy, especially with the forgiveness of sins for troubled consciences to those who heard his message.

But we, too, can hear that message. Every Christian sermon must show the mercy of God. The Gospel shows the mercy of God. Yes, every sermon should show us our sinfulness. That is preaching God's Law and showing our sinfulness. But no truly Christian sermon is complete without also showing God's mercy in the Gospel.

And the joy of God's mercy is that it doesn't depend on anything we do. Paul wrote in the letter to Christians in Rome: *"For [God] says to Moses, 'I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.' It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy."* (Romans 9:15-16 NIV)

In that grand chapter in Ephesians – chapter 2 – that assures that we are saved by grace and not by our works or good lives, Paul reminds us: *"But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions--it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus,"* (Ephesians 2:4-6 NIV)

"Jesus comes again in mercy When our hearts are bowed with care; Jesus comes again in answer To an earnest, heartfelt prayer."

We can talk to God in prayer. We have the privilege of talking to our God in prayer. Another hymn reminds us that “Prayer is the Christian’s vital breath, the Christian’s native air.” (TLH 454:5)

God is pleased when we ask him in prayer and we are assured by the Scriptures that ***“The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.”*** (James 5:16 NIV) And of course, we are righteous because of what Jesus did for us, not because of anything we do.

The hymn writer says that Jesus comes into our hearts when we pray, to answer our earnest heartfelt prayer. We may think of prayer as asking God for something and thanking God for something. Our catechism book speaks of prayer as “an act of worship in which we speak to God from our hearts.” We have an excellent example of that in Daniel 9 when Daniel ***“turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition.”*** (Daniel 9:3 NIV) And a few verses later he prays: ***“O Lord, listen! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, hear and act! For your sake, O my God, do not delay, because your city and your people bear your Name.”*** (Daniel 9:19 NIV)

Jesus warns us to pray from the heart with sincere hearts in Matthew 15: ***“These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men.”*** (Matthew 15:8-9 NIV)

We may bring prayers of request or thanksgiving to God about anyone or anything. Our prayers may be words given to us by another person, such as we have in our general prayers from a book of prayers. Our prayers may use the words our Savior taught us – which really ask for everything we need. I’m talking about the prayer we call “The Lord’s Prayer.” And we may especially use our own words in our prayers. Sometimes our most earnest, heartfelt prayers are those in which we use our own words and thoughts to approach God.

We pray all things “in Jesus’ name”, that is, in the name of God’s son who lived as a human suffering for us and being tempted in all things just as we are.

And if we should feel that our own words are inadequate, we must remember that ***“the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.”*** (Romans 8:26 NIV)

In answering our prayers, Jesus comes into our lives. He has many ways of answering prayers. In our impatience we always want a “yes” answer and we want it right now. In his answers to our prayers, Jesus may be pointing us to God and his written Word to patiently search for answers. But he may also be answering our prayers with a “no, not now.” I think we can all look back in our lives and realize how foolish some of our past prayers may have been.

Above all, our prayers should be from the heart, and should be asking God for what is good for us. We most often think in earthly terms and ask God for earthly things. But remember that of the seven petitions in the model prayer our Lord gave us – the Lord’s Prayer – only one asks for earthly things and that very simply – give us this day our daily bread.

And finally we are thankful for all Jesus does for us, especially his coming into our hearts! Even the hymn writer shouts “Alleluia! Alleluia! Comes to save us from despair.”

Remember too, the words of the other hymn: “Approach, my soul, the mercy-seat Where Jesus answers prayer; There humbly fall before His feet, For none can perish there.” “Be Thou my Shield and Hiding-place, That, sheltered near Thy side, I may my fierce Accuser face And tell him Thou hast died.” “O wondrous Love, to bleed and die, To bear the cross and shame, That guilty sinners such as I Might plead Thy gracious name!” (TLH hymn 456:1,4,5)

Do you realize what a grand blessing it is that God’s all-powerful Son comes to you in mercy? May we never forget that. Amen.