

Sermon Christ Lutheran, Platte Woods, MO

King David writes: "With the merciful You will show Yourself merciful; with a blameless man You will show Yourself blameless; With the pure You will show Yourself pure; And with the crooked You will show Yourself devious. You will save the humble, but Your eyes are on the proud, that You may bring them down."

The Lord is devious. This is not a kind of dishonest or wicked deviousness, since the Lord cannot be evil. Instead, it has to do with the prudent wisdom of the Lord in dealing shrewdly with the wicked.

The Lord treats people as they treat Him and His gracious gifts. We can see this in the way the saints – that is believers receive the gifts of creation, as opposed to how the wicked people do. The saints make proper use of all creation, because they use His blessings for the purpose of enjoying His goodness through those blessings. When eating a meal or enjoying recreation or noticing the beauty of the world, a saint sees the hand of God. The saint sees gifts – given without merit on the part of man, for the benefit of man in his need. The saint does not claim any right or control – but receives the gifts with thanksgiving – with faith in the Lord who is good.

On the contrary, the wicked enjoy the whole creation and make use of it apart from God, and even contrary to God, in defiance of His goodness. They enjoy God's blessings in such a way that they claim to have earned them, as if they were their own God. - Such as many people do in the west, in the US with their insatiable materialism. Or other wicked seek to attribute the gifts in creation to false gods, demons, or the spirits of their ancestors. The gifts of creation are not given by divine love – but are given by coercing and manipulating spirits – as is done in Africa. In this way, they show themselves crooked by the way they twist everything. It is not that God and His creations become something else. But in the crooked heart, all things are regarded as something else than what they are. The wicked toss the Word of God aside and fill it with selfishness and twisted opinions. This is what Ecclesiastes calls vanity. All things are crooked for the crooked.

With regard to reward and punishment, the saints have pleasure in all things, as the psalmist says, "You, O Lord, have made me glad through Your work." We know that God and all things work together for the sanctification of the saints, for the innocence of the innocent, for the election of the elect. Therefore even though it is difficult to accept in times of suffering - the evils of this life are holy, harmless, helpful, and chosen for their good. So the saints lovingly carry the cross of the Lord and joyfully bear the sufferings of Christ in faith in the wisdom and love of the Lord.

However, the evils of this life hurt the wicked much more, because through them they fall into blasphemies and curses and impatience, and they always become worse: they go from good to bad, and from bad to worse. Therefore all things are crooked for them, because when they have prosperity, they abuse it, and when they suffer adversity, they complain and blame others. They think they are good, so they are entitled to whatever good comes their way, and deserve no hardship. This is very much the case with the mentality many societies in Africa and the Middle East. Even though the Lord has blessed them with great fields and forests and riches and minerals in the ground – it is mismanaged and squandered and fought over with greed – so that only a few remain rich while others die of poverty.

When the wicked look around themselves, they think that the whole world and all of humanity is filled with evil- while they themselves, of their own value and merit are better than others or perfect. They see vices in others very clearly. They see the mote in the neighbor's eye, but not the beam in their own. They twist all things in their eyes so that good is bad, and evil is righteousness.

Yet the saints themselves do not think of things this way. They regard others as better than they are. The saints appear to themselves as sinners who do injury. In humility, they think of themselves as doing less than other men. Therefore they are humbled into nothing, beneath every creature. As the holy apostle says, "I am the foremost sinner." By comparison with themselves the saints do not even regard the evils of others as great. Thus the great saints are often on their knees in repentance and humility.

And rightly should we repent, since we do not act as we should. I have spoken of the wicked as opposed to the saints, but we are both. In our flesh, we are still crooked in our thinking. The saints know that the goodness and renewal of the world and her troubles, do not come about in accusing others and forcing others to do this or that, but from his or her own repentance and confession before Christ and of Christ. Only on account of Christ are we declared saints in God's sight. Too often, we saints forget ourselves and how we should act. Too often, we act as the wicked do, easily seeing the error in our neighbor, while overlooking our own. Too often, we despise our crosses and complain, as if God were not our loving Father. Sometimes, we are proud of our goodness, as if our goodness came from our own earning and works, rather than God's grace. May God remind us of who we are and how we should act, as He creates good works in us.

With the crooked man, however, God acts deviously. For He saves the humble, but brings down the proud. He lifts up the low and pushes down those who are high in their own eyes. In other words, He twists back into the right shape what man in his self-righteousness twists into the wrong shape. What man thinks is righteous, the Lord declares wicked. But the saints who confess that they are wicked, these He declares holy in His sight on account of Christ.

God's devious twisting is most visible at the Cross. There, the most innocent Man of all was called the worst sinner of all, and placed under God's wrath and punishment. The guiltless was treated as guilty. Christ, the innocent lamb, was treated as the most impure and vile of all. For the Lord laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

For we, by our fallen nature, also were the crooked twisters of God's creation and goodness. God had to treat us deviously. He had to create a righteousness that was not of works, but according to His shrewd wisdom. That wisdom put His own Son upon the Cross, and He became our righteousness. The righteousness for all men – for Americans in an advanced and arrogant society, and for Africans, Asians, and those in crooked, dysfunctional societies, for all mankind, for all sinners.

For God the Lord put Christ in your place. You belonged on the Cross. But God twisted everything around. You go free. The Lord of life dies. You get everything that belongs to Christ. You are clothed in Christ's holiness. You are immortal. You are kings and priests upon the earth. You have His authority to forgive sins. You have the Father's approval and affection, as if you were Christ, the only-begotten.

Therefore, you are the blameless and pure saints in God's eyes. You are His own people, precious in His sight. You are the righteous ones, cleansed by Christ's washing with water and the Word. He has passed the final verdict upon you, that you have never departed from His ways at all, completely innocent of any iniquity.

So you have received the never-ending reward, which is resurrection and eternal life in the new heaven and new earth. There, delights and blessings will be the reward He will give you, the reward that Christ earned for you, but you get to enjoy the benefits, forever and ever in perfect joy in the presence of all the saints from all tribes and nations and tongues and with the almighty and glorious Lord, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, the one eternal God.

In His Name and to His glory alone. Amen.