

Wednesday, December 17, 2014  
Midweek Advent 3

Advent Midweek 3

## Jesus Shows Us the Father's Heart

Psalm 103:11–13

He defends me against all danger and guards and protects me from all evil. All this He does out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me. For all this it is my duty to thank and praise, serve and obey Him.  
(SC, explanation of the First Article)

*For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us. As a father shows compassion to his children, so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him. (Ps 103:11–13)*

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!

Amen.

We Christians have a problem. Well, actually, we have a whole lot of problems—at least I do. But I'm thinking of one problem in particular. It has to do with how we try to describe God.

How can you describe the infinite God in human words?

If the universe cannot contain Him, how can mere human words contain or confess who He is?

Let me give you a couple of examples.

First, we use terms like "Holy Trinity," but we can never fully grasp the meaning. We can only go so far in defining the Three in One.

Another example is when we say that God is "just." Yet we can't comprehend what that really means, because the mere human justice we experience cannot compare to His perfect justice.

It seems as if every time we think we have God fully in a box of our making, and just as we prepare to drive the last nail into that box, He taps us on the shoulder and asks what we think we're building.

So how can we speak of God?

Luther explained the First Article of the Creed with words that help: "He defends me against all danger and guards and protects me from all evil. All this He does out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me. For all this it is my duty to thank and praise, serve and obey Him."

All of our efforts pale when we realize that, when all is said and done, what we really need to know is God's "fatherly, divine goodness and mercy." And amazingly, despite our limited understanding, we can in fact begin to comprehend this because JESUS SHOWS US THE FATHER'S HEART.

In every language, I suppose, there are some words that are so rich in meaning that it's impossible to find an equivalent word in another language.

In the Hebrew language there is this marvelous word *chesed*. כֶּסֶד  
It embraces the ideas of loving kindness, love, steadfastness, faithfulness, favor, grace.

English translations vary because they simply cannot encompass the loving compassion that God has for His children, but *chesed* points us to the very nature of our God, who Himself is love. (1 Jn 4:8).

The psalmist in our text this evening wrote, "*For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his chesed toward those who fear him*" (v 11).

The height and breadth of the *chesed* of God (that is, His loving kindness, faithfulness, grace, and love) is so boundless that it reaches from heaven to earth.

Oh, how you and I need that steadfast love, that *chesed*, of the Father!

Our sin is so deep and so profound that we can never reach to heaven. We see the evidence every day. We hear of wars and rumors of war. We watch as our fellow human beings engage in terrorism and murder. We see life given by God treated as an inconvenience to be disposed of in abortion clinics.

Ah! But we might say, "We have started no wars. We are not terrorists or murderers. We do not support the death of unborn children."

Oh, really? Have we looked into our hearts? Can any of us say that we have never in our hearts hated, never lusted, or never broken any part of God's Law?

In these days as we're shopping for one more . . . no, one *more* . . . no, *yet one more* package to put under the tree, have we never thought about the presents someone else is buying or getting and been feeling jealous?

Is that honoring our God, who gives us every good thing, any more than is a suicide bombing committed in the name of a false god?

And as these days we run here and there—not only to the mall, but to parties and concerts—supposedly preparing for the birth of a baby, have we been too busy to think about the three thousand babies each day who lose their lives to abortion in this country even before they're born?

Have we remained in self-protecting silence in the face of evil?

Surely we must all confess that God's mercy comes "without any merit or worthiness in us."

Despite all this, we are the children of the heavenly Father. We are bound to Him and Him to us. And this is true solely because His *chesed* extends from Him to the depths of humanity where we dwell.

So great is the Father's loving kindness, grace, and love to sinners that He reached from heaven to earth at a cost that we cannot fathom.

A world lost in sin could only be redeemed by the joining of God the Creator to man the creature. And so He sent His only begotten Son to be born as the Child of Mary and the Brother of all humanity.

He came to bear the sin of the world as the holy Lamb of God, the one final Sacrifice. He came so that the beautiful words of Psalm 103 would speak the greatest truth,

*“as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us”*

(v 12). All of our transgressions—our rebellion against God—would be placed as far from us as the east to the west, the sunrise is from the sunset.

See the *chesed* of God in His Son!

See Him preaching the Gospel to those who live in darkness.

See Him reaching out in love to embrace tax collectors, adulterous women, and other sinners rejected by those who thought themselves to be righteous.

See Him loving and calling to Himself those who live on the outer rims of society—lepers, Samaritans, and so many others.

See Him giving a meal to His disciples on the night in which He was betrayed, His blessed body and blood given for His Church of all ages.

See Him on a cross with thieves crucified on either side, and listen to Him say to the repentant thief hanging on the cross next to Him,

*“Today you will be with me in paradise.”*

See Him placed in the tomb of death and in love rising again to destroy death.

See Him commission His disciples to go to all the world to baptize all nations in His name and in the name of His Father and the Holy Spirit and to teach them all that He has commanded.

Jesus **is** divine *chesed* in human flesh. He is the manifestation of the Father’s great mercy bestowed on his wayward children.

The psalmist wrote, *“As a father shows compassion to his children, so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him”* (v 13).

There is another of those rich words, translated here as “compassion.” It means to show mercy, to love deeply, and to feel the pain of another.

For the Father, compassion is not just a thought or an idea; it is the action of giving His own Son as **your** Redeemer.

That Son continues to bring the *chesed* and the compassion of God right into your life and your moment of time.

You live as a baptized child of God, nurtured with His Sacrament and blessed with His Absolution, *“Your sin is forgiven. It is removed from you as far as the east is from the west.”*

*For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love [his chesed] toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us. As a father shows compassion to his children, so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him. (vv 11–13)*

In just a few more days, Advent will come to an end.

For weeks we’ve prayed, “Come, Lord Jesus.”

Now very soon we’ll celebrate the great miracle of Bethlehem, where the *chesed* and compassion of God, incarnate in the baby of Mary, first revealed His sacred face.

But already today, He comes to you and me, this very moment. And the day is also coming when He’ll come again, and all who have died in Christ will rise as He rose on Easter. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Amen.

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