

## Lent IV

Monday Isaiah 66: 10

### A Note of Joy

The original name for the Fourth Sunday in Lent is the Latin word *laetare*. It takes its name from the first word of the old Introit, *Rejoice*. Joy in Lent? Seems against the burying of the alleluias, the ashes, and the veiling of the crosses that some churches do in Lent, does not it?

Forty days of mourning over sin is too much for people who have been washed of their sins in Baptism, forgiven of their sins in Absolution, and Abodied and Ablooded to their Savior in Holy Communion. So this week, the half-way point of Lent, the Church has always let some of the light of Easter into the ash-grey darkness of Lent. Actually, of course none of the Sundays in Lent are part of the 40 day period of mourning. That is why they are called Sundays **in** Lent and not as Sundays are named during Easter, Sundays **of** Easter. The theme of the previous Sunday is to carry over into the following week like a tune that you just cannot get out of your head.

Well, this week the tune has a note of joy in it. There are two more weeks of Lent ahead and Holy Week where the Passion of our Lord becomes all the more intense, where we will see just how serious our sins are, and just what it means to Apay for them. Now is our Ahalftime; now the bands are on the field striking up a tune or two of joy because after all we are heading for a certain victory over sin.

In a way, this week is a safeguard against a very dangerous view of Lent: that Lent is Aour show, our time to really get serious about Christ, our time to do something for Jesus, to give something up, to make sacrifices for Him. NO! Lent is the time when the grace of God is magnified toward sinners. Why? Because we remember just how thoroughly sinful we are, just how far down we are, just how far down Christ Jesus had to come to redeem us. Lent is NOT a season where Jesus wants us to do things for Him. It is the season where He wants us to see just how wonderfully much He has done for us.

A note of joy comes into our Lenten song this week as we remember, AO yes, during Lent I see my sins all right, but I also see how my sins were all taken away, my life redeemed, and heaven given to me!

Prayer: Almighty God, our heavenly Father, Your mercies are new every morning, and though we have in no way deserved Your goodness, You still abundantly provide for all our wants of body and soul. Give us, we pray, Your Holy Spirit that we may heartily acknowledge Your merciful goodness toward us, give thanks for all Your benefits, and serve You in willing obedience; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

New Mercies

In our prayer this week we confess that our heavenly Father=s mercies Aare new every morning.≡ Our Bible reading for today, Psalm 136, has the repeated refrain, AHis love endures forever.≡ The King James Bible translates it AHis mercy endureth forever.≡ Every Sunday the Common Service Communion liturgy says, AO give thanks unto the Lord for He is Good. And His mercy endureth forever.≡

What a grand statement! Parent=s sometimes get Afed up≡ with their kids. Teachers can say, ANow that is the last straw.≡ Employers can say, AI have had it with you.≡ Our heavenly Father never says such things. His mercies are new every single morning. There never comes a time when He gets fed up with us, when we use up our last straw, or when God has had it with us. His mercies are new, bright, full, forgiving every single morning.

Go to the beach. Stand on the seashore where the waves roll in gently. Wave after wave comes in, and yet there is still another. If you camped out on the beach, every morning you got up there would be still more waves to wash over your feet. That is a picture of what it means for God=s mercies to be new every morning.

God=s is merciful toward us not because we try hard, believe enough, want to do better, or are getting better. God=s mercies are new every morning solely for the sake of Christ. Here is the fountainhead of God=s mercies: the wounds of Christ, the righteousness of Christ, the forgiveness of Christ. If you can find a sin that Christ did not die for, then you could find a point where God ceased to be merciful. If the wounds of Christ only went so deep as to pay for the sins of those not that bad or who really, really believed, then you could find a point where God=s mercies dried up. But you can find no such point, can you? Christ carried away the sins of the whole world, none excluded. Christ suffered already for all sinners, not just for some or even most. Christ did not just suffer for the godly but for the ungodly, not just for His friends but for His enemies.

Go back to the beach. Stand there for a long while. Will there ever come a point when a wave ceases to wash over you? No. Well, before the mercies of the Lord would run out those waves will. Waves do not endure forever, God=s mercy does. Oceans do not endure forever, God=s mercy does. The world does not endure forever, but Scripture says God's mercy does.

Prayer: Almighty God, our heavenly Father, Your mercies are new every morning, and though we have in no way deserved Your goodness, You still abundantly provide for all our wants of body and soul. Give us, we pray, Your Holy Spirit that we may heartily acknowledge Your merciful goodness toward us, give thanks for all Your benefits, and serve You in willing obedience; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Thursday Matthew 5:45

### Only Out of Fatherly Divine Goodness and Mercy

In our Collect this week we are remembering God=s Amerciful goodness towards us.≡ But His mercy does not just extend to us. It is over all the world. In the Bible reading, we hear Jesus telling us that God is so merciful He sends His rain to fall on the just and the unjust. In the Explanation to the First Article of the Apostle=s Creed, we also highlight that mercy of God. We speak of all that God provides us Aonly out of fatherly divine goodness and mercy.≡ But just to make sure that we never secretly think that there is anything in us (goodness) or about us (faith) that causes God to send these blessings, we do not just confess we get the blessings of God Aonly out of fatherly divine goodness and mercy.≡ No, we go on to say, Awithout any merit or worthiness in me.≡

Do you know what that means? When you sin, and you will; when you are feeling like you have let God, Church, family, or someone else down, and you will; when you are just certain that your sins are so great that God=s sun should refuse to shine on you, His rain should refuse to fall, and all of His creation should rebel against you, you can rejoice that God=s merciful goodness is not linked to your merits. All the world, all religions, all human reason, would say that God=s gifts must be linked to people=s behavior. But that is not what the Bible says.

When rains are watering the croplands, God knows there are wretched sinners down there. When His sun shines providing light, energy, and food to your area, you can be sure that God knows that there are people on earth who care nothing at all about Him. But that does not stop God. Think about this. If the man who runs the grocery, makes sure he has plenty of healthy food for people he does not even know, how much better do you think he cares for his own family? If the man at the 7-11 who does not know or care for you at all lets you have a candy bar though you are a nickel short, what do you think he would do for his own child?

We are engraved on God=s hands says the Bible. We are the apple of His eye. He has our hairs numbered. He has made us His by Baptism. He gave up His only Son rather than let us go. How much more do you think this God who provides rain and sun, blessing and goodness, to all of creation, will take care of His children - even when they are dirty, stubborn, or disobedient?

Prayer: Almighty God, our heavenly Father, Your mercies are new every morning, and though we have in no way deserved Your goodness, You still abundantly provide for all our wants of body and soul. Give us, we pray, Your Holy Spirit that we may heartily acknowledge Your merciful goodness toward us, give thanks for all Your benefits, and serve You in willing obedience; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Friday Luke 11: 9-13

### What We Really Need

In the Collect for this week we acknowledge that our heavenly Father abundantly provides for all our wants of body and soul. What more could we possibly want or ask for if our heavenly Father provides for us everything physically and spiritually? In the Collect we pray for the Holy Spirit.

Why do we pray for the Holy Spirit? Do not we have Him in Baptism? Does not the Holy Spirit reach out and touch us whenever the Word is preached, taught, or read? Does not the Holy Spirit by means of the Body and Blood of Christ create in us a new heart and renew in us a right spirit? Yes, yes, and yes. But we also receive daily bread without our prayers, yet still our Lord directs us to pray for it each day in the prayer He taught us to pray so that we would be led to know it, and to receive it with thanksgiving.

We pray for the Holy Spirit because we need to be reminded that without Him we could not acknowledge God=s merciful goodness towards us or give thanks for all His benefits. Without the Holy Spirit we would do exactly like the Children of Israel did in the wilderness or the crowds did at the time of Jesus. Everyone in Israel saw how the Lord parted the Red Sea, showered them with manna, and provided rivers of water in the wilderness, but most still fell away. Thousands were fed by Christ, hundreds saw Him heal people, dozens and dozens saw Him raise the dead, but most did not acknowledge His goodness towards sinners or give thanks for His benefits.

How come? Because whenever God works through means He can be explained away. By means of wind the Lord parted the Red Sea, by means of Moses striking a rock water flowed, by means of a descending dew He dropped manna. Likewise, by means of the Body born of Mary, Jesus fed the hungry, healed the sick and raised the dead. People simply explained the great workings of God away. People still do this today. Their comfortable living is due to a good economy. Their health is due to exercise and diet. Hurricanes miss and tornadoes skip because of weather patterns not the hand of God.

Without the Holy Spirit testifying to us about the wonderful workings of God behind ordinary means, we would explain away our kind, heavenly Father=s providing for us too. Therefore, we pray, Agive us Your Holy Spirit,≡ so that we might rightly appreciate the powerful workings of our invisible God.

Prayer: Almighty God, our heavenly Father, Your mercies are new every morning, and though we have in no way deserved Your goodness, You still abundantly provide for all our wants of body and soul. Give us, we pray, Your Holy Spirit that we may heartily acknowledge Your merciful goodness toward us, give thanks for all Your benefits, and serve You in willing obedience; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Saturday Psalm 116:12,13

For All This It is My Duty....

This week we are praying that our heavenly Father would give us thankful hearts. This is something sinners like us need to pray for because otherwise out of our hearts only comes evil thoughts and all manner of sins. Our Catechism teaches us this as well under the First Article of the Apostles Creed where we say, AFor all this [the providing and protecting that God does for us each day Awithout any merit or worthiness≡ in us] it is our duty to thank and praise, serve and obey Him.≡

If you look on page 115 of the Explanation part of Luther=s Small Catechism, you will find Psalm 116:12 quoted. AHow can I repay the Lord for all His goodness to me?≡ You know what the problem is if you read Psalm 116 verses 12 and 13 for the Bible reading today. The Explanation does not quote verse 13 which answers the question of verse 12 in a strange way. Verse 13 answers AHow can I repay the Lord for all His goodness to me?≡ with, AI will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord.≡ How=s that? I will repay the Lord by taking more from Him. I will repay Him by calling upon Him more and more. Does that make sense to you?

Sure it does or it will. Ask your mother or grandmother how they feel after they have cooked a great big meal and you ask for seconds. Ask your father or grandfather how they feel after they have taught you something and you ask for more instruction, more help.

How come it is this way? Loving mothers and grandmothers, loving dads and granddads want to do things for their kids and grandkids. Now it is true that since parents and grandparents are sinners they will sometimes snap at you when you ask for more. But never your heavenly Father. He has a perfect love for you in Christ. He just loves to provide things for you, to do things for you, and to help you. He is in heaven thinking, AO I hope she'll ask me for something today!≡ AO how I wish he would ask Me for help!≡

Have you ever been hungry or needed help with something and the one who takes care of you found out and said in a sad way, AO, I wish you had let me know. Why did not you ask me?≡ That is how it is with your heavenly Father. As Luther tells us in the Catechism, AGod would by these words [telling us to call Him AFather≡] tenderly invite us to believe that He is our true Father, and that we are His true children, so that we may with all boldness and confidence ask Him as dear children ask their dear father.≡

Yes, for all that our God does for us it is our duty to thank and praise Him serve and obey Him, but it is also our grand privilege to ask the One who provides for us for more.

Prayer: Almighty God, our heavenly Father, Your mercies are new every morning, and though we have in no way deserved Your goodness, You still abundantly provide for all our wants of body and soul. Give us, we pray, Your Holy Spirit that we may heartily acknowledge Your merciful goodness toward us, give thanks for all Your benefits, and serve You in willing obedience; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.