

Misericordias Domini

St. John 10:11-16

April 26, 2020

Alleluia! Christ is risen! *He is risen indeed! Alleluia!*

Today is popularly called “Good Shepherd Sunday,” but the old Latin title is *Misericordias Domini*: “The goodness of the Lord.” It comes from the Introit—the Psalm that starts the liturgy: **“The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord.”**

We can see God’s goodness in nature, and perhaps recognize that even more now that all the parks are closed.

And the parks are closed because the goodness of nature has turned deadly. But that’s nothing new. Animals, created with the fear of man, now will sting and bite, invade and devour. Floods and fire, scorching heat and tornadoes tell us that nature is not always good. Sometimes it kills. Behind such death is the wrath of God. So which is it? Is nature good, or bad?

Behind that question is another: Is God a God of wrath, or a God of love? That question sets up a false dichotomy.

It is better to say: God is both just and kind. His justice necessitates anger over sin, necessitates punishment for sin. That is the clear teaching of God’s Word in both Testaments. You can see these two teachings—judgment and mercy—side by side in today’s reading from Ezekiel: The Lord will bind up the injured, but, He says, **“the fat and the strong I will destroy.”** This refers to those who have made themselves fat by gorging on what belonged to others; and they used their strength—they used power—to abuse and hurt the weak.

There will be a judgment. There will be a reckoning. The Word of God says, **“Because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God’s righteous judgment will be revealed”** (Rom. 2.5).

Christianity is not a license to sin. That is abusing God's mercy. Again, it is written, **"Do you suppose ... that you will escape the judgment of God? Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?"** (Rom. 2.3f). Have you presumed on God's kindness in such a way that you live however you want? Do you ignore the commandments, presuming that you will be forgiven no matter what? Repent, and pray with the prophet Habakkuk, **"In Your wrath, remember mercy"** (Hab. 3.2).

The picture of the Good Shepherd is more complicated than a gentle pastoral scene with lambs frolicking. The teaching of the Good Shepherd shows both God's wrath and His mercy – or better, how God remembers mercy in the midst of wrath. Mercy comes to the sheep through wrath: the Shepherd dies, dies for the sheep, suffering the wrath the sheep deserve.

So what does this mean for you? It means that your new life now looks like your Shepherd. St. Peter says this is what it now means to be a disciple of Jesus, a follower of Christ: that you imitate the suffering of Jesus, that His death is the example for your life. He spells it out practically: it means you tell the truth, with no deceit in your mouth; you don't speak ill of others; and when people turn against you, you don't threaten them but entrust yourself to God and let Him be the judge.

The theological term for God's forgiveness is *justification*, and the term for our holiness is *sanctification*. Notice how they fit together like perfect companions in today's Epistle reading: **"He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree [justification], that we might die to sin and live to righteousness [sanctification]."**

The goodness of the Lord is not just in the nature around us, but in healing our nature. **"By His wounds we are healed."**

What needs healing in your life? Sins you have committed and are committing, sins that have been committed against you – the remedy and medicine is in the wounds of Jesus.

In God's wrath, He has remembered mercy. He has pardoned all your sins, and raised Jesus from the dead, a pledge of your own resurrection.

This week you are called to live as a disciple of Jesus. So in your wrath, remember mercy. Your wrath is not like God's. It is rarely, if ever, justified. In wrath, remember mercy. Remember God's mercy to you. Remember to be merciful to your neighbor. Remember Jesus. In His wounds is your healing.

And when we come to the day of resurrection, then will the words be fulfilled completely: **"The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord."**

In the Name of + Jesus

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