

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Twelfth Sunday After Trinity, August 22, 2021

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 342, 381:1, 25: 1-3, 385, 355.

Lessons: Isaiah 55: 8-11, 1 Corinthians 2: 1-16, John 10: 22-31.

Text: Romans 11: 33-36.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

In the first eleven chapters of this letter to the Christians in Rome, Saint Paul has laid out sin and grace, Law and Gospel in an unmistakable way. He has plainly taught us that God justifies us because of what Jesus Christ did for us. That means we – all men – have been declared NOT GUILTY. Those who believe this will be saved, and the only way to hear that message is from the Word of God. Saint Paul has spoken of Jews, to whom Jesus Christ was first sent, and of Gentiles, to whom he personally was sent to proclaim Jesus Christ. He has warned Gentiles, among whom we in this room would be numbered, not to boast that they are saved and the Jews are not. It is his hope, knowing that God surely wants all men to be saved, that the Jews will be brought back to Jesus Christ partly by seeing the blessings of God upon Gentiles.

Now he concludes this portion of his letter with this beautiful doxology, this hymn of praise. He marvels “*at the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!*”

OH, THE DEPTH OF THE RICHES OF THE WISDOM AND KNOWLEDGE OF GOD!

- 1. No one has known the mind of the Lord or been His counselor!**
- 2. God owes no man anything.**
- 3. Yet in his wisdom and knowledge, he gave us all grace in Jesus Christ!**

How marvelous that God in his all-knowing wisdom has come up with this grand plan of salvation which many of you have known from infancy.

Humans would never have been able to plan or devise anything like it. And even after God in his infinite wisdom devised this grand yet simple plan of salvation, we would never have been able to figure it out if he had not graciously revealed it to us. And even after he revealed it to us, we would never have been able to believe and accept it had he not sent his Holy Spirit into our hearts to work that faith.

These are exclamations: How deep is God’s wisdom! How deep is his knowledge! Wisdom is best defined as the ability to use knowledge for the highest purpose. Knowledge is the ability to provide the means wisdom needs. To help explain this, let’s use this example: I may know how to make explosive devices. That’s knowledge. But do I have the wisdom to use those explosive devices wisely and for the benefit of mankind? Or, to apply it in a way more directly to our text: You have the knowledge that God saved you from your sins. But you also want the wisdom to use that knowledge wisely. A wicked person would try to use that knowledge to live a sin-filled life. An unbeliever would try to use that knowledge to mock God. But one who believes in Jesus Christ as Savior would use that knowledge to live a God-pleasing life.

The attitude of the Christian will be to seek to use all the knowledge he gains – from the Bible and from everything else he learns – to please God and help his fellow humans.

This attitude is desperately needed these days. Humans are so very confident that they can do almost anything! But God's ways transcend our puny human capabilities, despite man's plans and intentions to do what he wants to do. We could apply this to such things as scientific research to seek the origins of the universe: How did all things come about? God tells us that he created all things by his word. Unbelieving man can't accept that. Even if an unbeliever claims to believe in "creation", that kind of creationism may simply be an idea such as religiously neutral "intelligent design" without pondering the implications of such a generic belief. Or we could look at what humans intend to do: Many want to eventually establish colonies of humans on Mars, if we are to believe the goals of current space exploration. Many feel that any disease – even HIV and AIDS can be conquered by a vaccine. A vaccine, remember, is something that prevents you from getting the disease even if you come in contact with it. When will puny man learn that God's prevention to the sinful spread of HIV and AIDS is the Sixth Commandment? "Thou shalt not commit adultery!" Sex belongs only within marriage – one man and one woman for a lifetime! God in his wisdom has the answer, the solution, the preventative. But men won't accept it, because that means accepting such a concept as sin.

How unsearchable [are God's] judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! Who can know what is going on in the mind of God? No one.

Our sermon text is correctly printed like poetry in the NIV:

"Who has known the mind of the Lord?

Or who has been his counselor?"

***"Who has ever given to God,
that God should repay him?"***

These are really rhetorical questions, that is, questions that don't really want or need an answer, in this case, because the answer is so obvious to the Christian, the Child of God.

Each of these questions leads us to acknowledge that absolutely nobody gave God any help with devising the marvelous plan of salvation where his grace and mercy predominates. Thus there is only one possible reaction, and that is to give all glory to the Triune God.

Who knows what is going on in the mind of God? The more you read of Scripture, the more you marvel at the way everything throughout history has happened. The more you immerse yourself in the Word of God, the more you marvel at how God knew the answers all the time when men were trying to do things on their own. Why, for example, were there 42 generations from Abraham to the birth of Christ? How impatient the Jews were! God sent the Savior in his good time. Why, for example, did Abraham and Sarah take things into his own hands and not trust God that they themselves would have a child – Isaac – and instead have a child through Hagar – Ishmael – whose descendants are fighting with the descendants of Isaac – the Jews – over the promised land to this very day! If only they had listened to God and believed God!

No one has given advice to God. He is the eternal creator and man is his creation. God was the potter, and man is the clay vessel God has made. How dare man presume to know better than God! Men have all sorts of false ideas about all sorts of things, including the origin of the universe. We have been deceived into thinking that some sort of evolution took place to get us and our world where it is today. We want to ask people who believe such things: Were you there? How do you know what really happened? Can you prove it! How do you know for sure? All who reject Creation have to take some great big leaps of faith to accept. Many who have studied evolution state that evolution requires much more faith than believing the Bible when it comes to creation of all things.

No one has ever given to God so that God “owes” him. This applies especially to the message of eternal salvation. God owes no man anything. We broke and continually break the laws he gave us. And if you think about it, in one sense Adam and Eve had only one commandment, and they broke that one commandment. They disobeyed the one command God had given them!

God doesn’t owe us anything. Yet how many people feel that they can do something to help earn their way into heaven! We must all admit that we are sinners, and not capable of the perfect obedience to God’s commands that is necessary to earn heaven.

Scripture is loaded with illustrations of God’s grace given to us through Jesus Christ as these examples show:

(Jeremiah 29:11 NIV) ***“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future”.*** Perhaps the KJV is more familiar: (Jeremiah 29:11 KJV) ***“For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end.”***

(Isaiah 55:8-11 NIV) ***“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the LORD. “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.”***

(Isaiah 40:13-14 NIV) ***“Who has understood the mind of the LORD, or instructed him as his counselor? Whom did the LORD consult to enlighten him, and who taught him the right way? Who was it that taught him knowledge or showed him the path of understanding?***

(1 Corinthians 2:16 NIV) ***“For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him?” But we have the mind of Christ.***

(2 Peter 1:2-4 NIV) ***Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.***

Through the doxology which is our sermon text, Saint Paul concludes there is only one possible reaction, and that is to give all glory to the Triune God: ***For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever!***

This thought is echoed repeatedly in the book of Revelation, talking about eternity: (Revelation 4:11 NIV) ***“You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being.”*** (Revelation 5:12 NIV) ***In a loud voice they sang: “Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!”*** (Revelation 5:13 NIV) ***Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing: “To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!”*** (Revelation 7:12 NIV) ***“All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying: “Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!”***

Can you do anything but rejoice and shout for joy about what God has done for you? Amen.

(Reprinted from Ministry By Mail for August 10, 2008)