

**MINISTRY BY MAIL**  
**Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship**  
[www.lutheranlccf.org](http://www.lutheranlccf.org)  
**Thanksgiving, November 22, 2012**

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)  
Hymns: 570, 568, 572, 573, 50:1-2.  
Lessons: Psalm 103. 1 Timothy 6:6-11, Matthew 6:25-34.  
Sermon Text: Lamentations 3:21-26.  
Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

If you want to read about tough times then read the book of Lamentations. They were terrible times: famine, desolation, destruction, war, betrayal, and no one to lead the nation are lamented in this short book, only five chapters. This book is Hebrew poetry, very carefully composed, generally following a pattern called an acrostic. In 3 chapters, each verse begins with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet. The middle chapter, chapter 3, has 3 verses starting with each letter.

For four decades Jeremiah, preaching ‘this is what God says’ has predicted the destruction of Jerusalem. It has now taken place. This is a book of weeping and sadness, of lamentation.

Jeremiah doesn’t take long before he points out the reason for all this desolation. He points out how the nation of Judah and the city of Jerusalem, the place of God’s temple, and its people have had terrible things come upon them and in the fifth verse of this book gives the reason: ***“Because of their many sins.”*** Lamentations 1:5.

Lamentations not a pleasant book to read. It brings home to the reader the inescapable results of sin and unbelief. But even more it points to the Lord, the God of love and grace. It assures us that in him we are never without hope. The book throughout laments the woe and suffering sin had brought upon the people in the destruction of the city and the kingdom. The writer realizes the Lord is righteous in punishing His sinning people, and calls upon them to repent. In the midst of despair, we see hope as the writer appeals for divine mercy.

So is this a sermon for Thanksgiving day that just talks about how terrible things are? No. We must remember from the Word of God that

**NO MATTER HOW BAD THINGS APPEAR,**  
**“THE LORD IS GOOD TO THOSE WHO HOPE IN HIM.”**

1. ***“Because of the Lord’s great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail.***
2. **The Lord’s mercies are new every morning.**
3. ***“The LORD is my portion; therefore I will wait for him.”***

The nation that was God’s chosen people in no way deserved God’s mercy. But they knew that a merciful Lord controls the future as he had the past. This Lord of might and mercy rules in heaven and his will is done on earth. In him they found hope in their despair. This hope was not an illusion. Their former hopes rested upon themselves. The real hope rested in the nature of a God whose character and will had been revealed especially to them throughout their national history. He was and is the God who saves purely by grace.

God’s grace, his undeserved love and mercy must be the centerpiece of our celebration of Thanksgiving. Surely we could talk about all the things, the material things of this world that God has provided for us. Although we may not always have had all we wanted, God has surely provided all we need.

We have life and breath, as we read in Acts 17:25: ***“he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else.”***

We have food and raiment – both clothes on our body and a roof over our heads. Paul tells us in 1 Timothy 6:8: ***“having food and raiment let us be therewith content.”*** In our Gospel lesson you heard Jesus say: ***“So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”*** (Matthew 6:31-34) No one in this room is living in a box under a bridge and scrounging garbage cans and food kitchens for our meals.

Our hymns today speak abundantly to the things of this world which God has provided for us and we are thankful for all those things.

But even more than this, as we sang in our first hymn: “And for richer food than this, Pledge of everlasting bliss; For His mercies still endure, Ever faithful, ever sure.”

God has provided us with the hope of heaven, the hope of a life even better than anyone could enjoy here on earth. He’s even provided a door, the way to enter into and share in that which we glimpse through a window, as it were. God has provided the way to get to that even better life through Jesus Christ. We read in John 10:7 (KJV) ***“Then said Jesus unto them again, Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep.”*** And in John 14:6 (NIV) ***“Jesus answered, ‘I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.’”***

So too you could look around you every day and see the blessings God has given you. And you gather here regularly in worship to be reminded especially of the spiritual blessings God has provided you for time and for eternity.

The early Christian church had good reason to select our sermon text as one of the lessons to be used for Thanksgiving Day. In all their terrible times, Jeremiah says ***“Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope.”*** In all his despair, he knows where to turn for hope. Believers do, too, if they can believe that God forgives all their sins because of what Jesus did and realize that it is ***“Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.”*** We read in the King James Version: ***“It is of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not.”***

You know what we deserve because of our sins. Eternal damnation. But in addition, we deserve God’s anger and trouble during our lives on earth. People like to think that they are the ones who have kept themselves out of trouble. But even in some secular circumstances, people are forced to realize and admit that it is they themselves who have brought their misfortunes upon themselves, just as did the people in Jeremiah’s day. It is not just empty words that we confess that we have sinned in “thought, word, and deed” and that we have “justly deserved [God’s] temporal and eternal punishment”. Those, of course, are things we humans don’t like to hear. We hate to take blame for anything. But those plain teachings of the Word of God are reinforced by our text today: ***“Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail.”*** We deserve to be consumed.

But God’s great love, his mercies, his tender mercy, his compassion never fail. They are always waiting for our faith. We daily approach God as did David in Psalm 51:1 ***“When Nathan the prophet came unto him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba. Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions.”***

And we know that he will cover our sins and forgive and forget them, and blot out our transgressions, even better than the paper towel in the television advertisement blots up stains.

This is all his doing, and none of our own. He loves us as his children. He loves us so much that he sacrificed his only-begotten Son so that we might have everlasting life. That is how great his compassions are.

Every day the Lord offers us his mercies anew. Yet how do we start our day? Not often praising God, do we. Not often thanking him for his mercies and compassions that ***“are new every morning.”*** Then it’s almost as if Jeremiah is going along writing these words and suddenly interjects: ***“Great is your faithfulness.”*** Oh God, your faithfulness is great!

Together with Jeremiah in his desperate situation we can say to ourselves – and together in this worship service: ***"The LORD is my portion; therefore I will wait for him. The LORD is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him; it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD."***

That word portion means inheritance or allotment. An inheritance is first of all a gift. People don't usually end up DOING something to DESERVE an inheritance. And the Lord is your portion, your inheritance, not Satan, not the devil whose future and inheritance is eternal damnation – unless you turn your back on the inheritance, the portion that God gives you out of his great love. Truly we can say that ***"The LORD is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him."*** And how is it that we can seek him? "The Holy Spirit has called me by the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith."

The people to whom Jeremiah first wrote these words knew from experience what their sin had done to them. They acknowledged that the Lord had no reason to do them any good. He had every right to forsake them forever, but he could not for he had loved them with an everlasting love. He is the God of promise. A God who keeps his word. His love had shown itself in his actions again and again. He could not help himself. His love fired his compassion so that out of his deep feeling for them he was stirred to come to their rescue time after time. Their history was a record of his love in action on their behalf. Every morning, every week, every year of their national and personal existence, they had received new evidence of God's mercy. Although they had failed and had broken faith on their part, they could still rely on their God. He does not break faith. He keeps his word. They could still confess joyfully: ***"great is your faithfulness!"***

Deprived of everything, they still had an eternal inheritance, an inheritance richer than any man could supply. They already had the greatest possession: they belonged to the Lord. The Lord himself was their portion as the psalmist says, ***"Keep me safe, O God, for in you I take refuge. I said to the LORD, "You are my Lord; apart from you I have no good thing." As for the saints who are in the land, they are the glorious ones in whom is all my delight. The sorrows of those will increase who run after other gods. I will not pour out their libations of blood or take up their names on my lips. LORD, you have assigned me my portion and my cup; you have made my lot secure. The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; surely I have a delightful inheritance. I will praise the LORD, who counsels me; even at night my heart instructs me. I have set the LORD always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure, because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay. You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand."*** Psalm 16

Psalm 73:25-26 echoes that idea: ***"Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever."***

With Paul we can say ***"For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed."*** (2 Corinthians 4:6-9)

Jeremiah was certain of what the future held and he began the next verses with the word 'good'. He himself had experienced the goodness of God. To those who hope in him he is good. To those who seek him, he gives good things, for he has promised, ***"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you."*** (Matthew 7:7) Knowing that he is good and knowing that good will surely come, it is good for us to wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord. His goodness will not fail.

In every sermon, you should hear about God's goodness and his grace. Sure, you will be reminded that you – like all men – are sinners. But you will be told that God forgives your sins for Jesus sake. And for all that we are thankful today. Amen.