

HIS MERCY ENDURES FOREVER
St. Peter Evangelical Lutheran Church
St. Peter, Minnesota
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Pastor (ret.) Lynn E. Wiedmann
Lamentations 3:22-33

²² **Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail.**

²³ **They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.**

²⁴ **I say to myself, "The LORD is my portion; therefore I will wait for him."**

²⁵ **The LORD is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him;**

²⁶ **it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD.**

²⁷ **It is good for a man to bear the yoke while he is young.**

²⁸ **Let him sit alone in silence, for the LORD has laid it on him.**

²⁹ **Let him bury his face in the dust-- there may yet be hope.**

³⁰ **Let him offer his cheek to one who would strike him, and let him be filled with disgrace.**

³¹ **For men are not cast off by the Lord forever.**

³² **Though he brings grief, he will show compassion, so great is his unfailing love.**

³³ **For he does not willingly bring affliction or grief to the children of men.**

HAVE MERCY ON US—
MERCY THAT ENDURES FOREVER!

From very little on my parents taught me to pray, *O give thanks unto to the LORD, for he is good; for his mercy endureth forever.* At the same time my church was teaching me to sing, *Lord, have mercy on us. Christ, have mercy on us. Lord, have mercy on us.* My grandparents and my school taught me to pray, *Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life...* Later I saw that a whole psalm (Psalm 136) repeats after every verse, **“for his mercy endures forever.”** And I learned that this word and its synonym partners fill the Old Testament.

I'm also pretty sure that I didn't spend much time thinking about it. I said my words. I learned my parts. I believed the truth. I enjoyed the word pictures, but why, in a world filled with talk about “love,” (whatever that means) does this word “mercy” keep showing up in my Bible?

I am convinced that this little phrase of explanation was written for the worst day of my life, for the worst day of your life!

The book of Lamentations begins with a blood-curdling scream, a scream repeated at the beginning of chapters 1, 2, and 4. אָחָא Aaaaachaaaa Aaaaachaaaaa Aaaaachaaaa!

Jeremiah was facing the worst day of his life. The Babylonians were destroying God's house and carrying his holy things to the pagan temples in their capital city. The best and the brightest of the land were carried off into captivity, but he could not go with them. And those who would remain behind would fare worse than the captives. And all of this came because the people of God would not listen to God or to his prophet. All of this came "because of their fault, their own fault, their own grievous fault."

But their sins brought pain misery and suffering to Jeremiah as well. Chased by the kings; slowly sinking into the mud of the well; his precious scrolls sliced to bits; and finally his senseless death in Egypt.

Looming over our heads is also the final judgment and the threat of hell—which would truly be the worst day of my life. My spiritual nightmare has always been that I would fall away from Jesus a minute or two before I died and then spend an eternity in hell. (I suppose if you don't believe in hell the nightmare goes away for a while.)

You see, after sixty-seven years of trying to do better has only taught me that "I cannot by my own thinking or choosing believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him," or remain in him. No wonder Dante, who gives a poetic tour of hell, describes the words over the doorway to hell:

But instead of making the story of his life "a living hell," or as Dante describes the entrance to hell: **ABANDON ALL HOPE, YOU WHO ENTER HERE**, God's gracious Spirit gave him and us a prayer for the worst day of our life, and a sentence to give a promise of hope and empower a life hope even on the worst day of our life:

HIS MERCY ENDURES FOREVER!

2.The Promise of Hope because his mercy endures forever

We are not used to reading Hebrew poems that are 2,600 years old. So try this unusual way of reading. Verses 31-33 all start with the word "for" (in Hebrew). These verses explain verses 22-24. They tell us why "**the mercy of the LORD**" is our greatest hope even on the worst day of our life.

²² **Because of the LORD's great love [mercy] we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail.**

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²³ **They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.**

³² **Though he brings grief, he will show compassion, so great is his unfailing love.**

²⁴ **I say to myself, "The LORD is my portion; therefore I will wait for him."**

³³ **For he does not willingly bring affliction or grief to the children of men.**

God looks at sinners with three special attitudes: (1) The first is "**great love**" the same word in "his mercy endures forever;" "goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life." This special word brings together our words of grace, love, and faithfulness and puts them in the marriage "till death us do part" promise. This is simply not going to stop, and remember we are talking about God's promise to sinner!

(2) The second is the word for the intense pain we feel—that throwing up feeling—when we see someone in great suffering. Yes, God feels that when he looks at sinners! That compassion and

sympathy not only never fails, it is **(re)newed every morning**. “New every morning” reminds me that yesterday’s failings and errors, yesterday’s rebellion and guilt are forgotten and lost in the sea of mercy. It is this **FOREVER MERCY, FOREVER COMPASSION, FOREVER FAITHFULNESS** that anchors my hope and empowers my hope-filled life.

(3) The third word is the word *faithfulness*. This is the word of a “life-time guarantee,” except that a life-time is too short for promises that last **FOREVER**.

I can count on the LORD himself to be my portion, my inheritance. You see his kingdom and his power and his glory are mine (by grace, by mercy, by kindness, by love alone)—but truly mine forever!

3. The Power/Practice of Hope since his mercy endures forever

God has designed his mercy to produce hope every day—a real and practical hope that can be seen in the lives of believers. Jeremiah matches verses 25-27 with verses 28-30 to teach this:

In the triplet set of verses 25-27 each line begins with “good,” the word that fills the first chapter of Genesis and the psalmist prayers: “**O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; for his mercy endures forever.**”

The poet Jeremiah repeats that word three times at the beginning of each sentence so that we see it written in great big letters. On the worst day of my life, my hope says, “O give thanks to the LORD for he is good!” That’s what forever mercy promises

²⁵ **The LORD is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him;**

²⁸ **Let him sit alone in silence, for the LORD has laid it on him.**

(1) Even when it appears that God is withholding his love, mercy, compassion and care from us, that is never **FOREVER**. Suffering will end but mercy will not. What must end is the griping and complaining, cursing and threatening are removed by mercy that endures forever.

Since the Lord is only doing what is good, it is good for me to sit in silence with Job rather than charging God with doing what is evil or “speaking words without knowledge” (Job 38).

²⁶ **it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD.**

²⁹ **Let him bury his face in the dust-- there may yet be hope.**

(2) Since the LORD is good, it is **good** for us to “**wait quietly**” for the LORD’s salvation.

Patient waiting does not give God time tables. It simply watches the clock tick and waits with the full assurance that God’s mercy endures forever.

Ancients buried their faces in the dust when they approached their kings and lords. This kind of humility properly describes the patient waiting for the LORD’s mercy that endures forever.

²⁷ **It is good for a man to bear the yoke while he is young.**

³⁰ **Let him offer his cheek to one who would strike him, and let him be filled with disgrace.**

It was necessary for God to destroy the pride that lurked in St. Paul’s heart. It remains necessary for God to remove false hopes and false security blankets, so that we trust in God alone.

Martin Luther explained that suffering was the third great part of the Christian life, along with Bible study and prayer. Suffering is the practice field that grows and strengthens hope, while at the same time attacking the enemies of faith that live inside of us.

This central set of verses, we are not be surprised that these words describe and predict Jesus' suffering. He faced the ultimate humiliations; he endured the most brutal beatings. Yet he never opens his mouth for complaining or cursing, only for calling on the LORD.

He prayed when God had abandoned him. Yet he prayed in hope because God had taught him to hope from the time he was born. He patiently prayed. He patiently waited "and on the third day" he rose again.

That hope was fulfilled when Jesus rose gloriously from the dead Sunday morning. We see the result of his mercy that endures forever. It leaves us with a promise that this mercy endures forever is for us and the power to live in hope each day.

*O, give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;
for his mercy endures forever! Amen.*

Sermon Hymn(s)

Today Your Mercy Calls Us (CW 339)

When All Your Mercies, O My God (CW 259)

Kyrie, God Father in Heaven Above (CW 266)

Psalm and Lessons

Psalm 6, 32, 38

Lamentations 3:22-33

2 Corinthians 12:(1-10) 7-10 Thorn in Flesh

Publican in Temple

Theme:

HAVE MERCY ON US—MERCY THAT ENDURES FOREVER!

1. The Problem for Hope
 without mercy that endures forever
2. The Promise of Hope
 because his mercy endures forever
3. The Practice of Hope
 since his mercy endures forever

The Cause of Hope

²² Because of the LORD's great love חסדו we are not consumed,
for his compassions רחמייו never fail.

²³ They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness אמונתך.

²⁴ I say to myself, "The LORD is my portion חלקי; therefore I will wait for him."

The Conclusion of Hope

²⁵ טוב The LORD is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him;

²⁶ טוב it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD.

²⁷ טוב It is good for a man to bear the yoke while he is young.

The Practice to Hope

²⁸ **Let him** sit alone in silence, for the LORD has laid it on him.

²⁹ **Let him** bury his face in the dust-- there may yet be hope.

³⁰ **Let him** offer his cheek to one who would strike him, and **let him** be filled with disgrace.

The [Proof] Explanation of Hope

³¹ לא For men are **not** cast off by the Lord **forever**.

³² לא Although he brings grief, he will show compassion ורחם, so great is his unfailing love (חסדו) נחמתי.

³³ לא For he does not willingly bring affliction or grief to the children of men.