



This Week

July 16, 2006

This Week's Sermon Text: Lamentations 3:22-33

Burdened With Mercy

Vicar Philip Casmer

Compassionate mothers cooked their babies – that was how bad it got and it sounds unreal – God's people ate their babies. God's own people! God's city, Jerusalem, was under siege and the sighs and screams of God's people echo in Jeremiah's Lamentations. They felt their lives had been consumed; they felt they had nothing left. They were angry about the burdens of hardship; they felt unfairly abandoned and abused – and God spoke through Jeremiah – with the true label for old pain – new mercy. The people just didn't recognize it for what it was – they were weighted down, but with the great love of God. They were Burdened with Mercy.

*We wait with expectation
and hope for good from
God's hand.*

Acknowledge It

You and I could be accused of the same sinful anger as the people of Israel. We are burdened with the things of life: jobs that annoy us; money that runs out all too quickly; decisions to make and decisions not made the way we like; sicknesses and heartaches that are about to overwhelm us; or solitude and loneliness that weigh heavy on our hearts. Are you ever angry about the burden; and if so, why? Let's call it "Las Vegas Syndrome." The latest Las Vegas commercial theme has evolved from "What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas," to something that better reflects our attitude: "What happens in Vegas should be happening to YOU!" Is that your attitude sometimes? Not about Vegas, but about life – that we deserve everything, and that everything better be the best? It's like a birthday card for life: "Wishing you all the best..." And sometimes we think we deserve it.

Lamentations 3:22-33

*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.*

*I say to myself, "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.*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

In reality, it isn't true; so that, like Israel, we can say (and maybe often), "What's happening in my life shouldn't be happening to me." Therefore, the last thing we want to do sometimes is follow Jeremiah's advice and "wait for the Lord" – because we just don't want to wait that long. And rather than remember the Lord as our portion – as our "everything," we are content to let this life be our "everything." We wait with expectation and hope for good from God's hand; we wait with expectation and hope while receiving good from God's hand; and we see it as strong faith. But it can be no faith at all,

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(Continued from page 1)

just faith in our own happiness. That makes us guilty like Israel of not seeing the situation for what it is – a call to turn to God.

The bad thing about “What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas” is that it isn’t true. No sin is hidden. What happened in the cool shade, under a forbidden tree, deep in the Garden of Eden didn’t stay deep in the Garden of Eden – it grew uncontrollably right out into the open. What happens in the deep dark recesses of your hearts and minds doesn’t stay in the deep dark recesses of your hearts and minds. We can be inwardly angry. Maybe we don’t even act on it – but “the Lord knows the thoughts of man (Psalm 94:11),” all of them. We have sinned when we don’t accept this life for the way God has laid it on us. We have sinned when we complained that it all isn’t going our way. We are deserving of certain things – but they all have to do with real pain, real burden, and real solitude – of the eternal kind. We don’t deserve any day of life at all – we deserve nothing. In fact, it is only because of the Lord’s great mercy we are not consumed (Lam 3:22).”

For the repentant heart, there’s something other than the nothing we deserve. “I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me; I was found by those who did not seek me...All day long I have held out my hands to an obstinate people, who walk in ways not good, pursuing their own imaginations (Isaiah 65:1-2).” That doesn’t sound like destruction, does it? God didn’t have to reveal himself; he didn’t have to create us or give us lives weighed down with his love. But he gave us mercies, “new every morning.” He reached out to us, in sin, and burdened us with mercy that turns us back to him. With mercy new on that Easter morning, after paying the payment we deserved, Jesus conquered sin and death and walked out of the tomb alive to bring mercy to you.

Cherish It

“**N**ew every morning.” That’s what God’s mercy is. It could look like dark clouds and heavy burdens to you, or it could look like laughing children and peace of mind – but it’s all God’s mercy. The children of God acknowledge that they’ve got burdens – they’ve been Burdened with Mercy. But it goes far beyond acknowledging. The burdens of life are God’s overflowing gifts of love and so children of God cherish those gifts.

Consider with me your burden of mercy. Is it hard to carry your burden? This week we filled in the play system post-holes with cement. 6,400 lbs. of heavy cement bags – they’re just not fun to carry. After a while that burden gets to you – it hurts. But if you heard that we carried bags of gold around

the playground – I doubt you would hear complaints. No, “We carried 6,400 lbs. of gold – and now we’re all rich, unbelievably rich,” that’s what you’d hear. Is it hard to carry the burden, or is it just that we forget what we carry? Our lives are treasures from God: weighty, heavy treasures of inestimable value, because they’re not what we deserve. They’re the opposite: lives washed in the eternal blood of the Lamb (more precious than all the gold in the world), the blood of God that buys what gold cannot – eternal love. That’s treasure – not receiving what you deserve, but receiving new mercies instead – mercies immeasurable.

The burdens of life are God’s overflowing gifts of love and so, as children of God, cherish those gifts.

That’s how Jeremiah describes God’s mercy in verse 32, “If he works severely, he also works tenderly. His stockpiles of loyal love are immense (Lam 3:32, The Message).” The preschoolers sing about that love. “How much do I love Jesus? This much? No, that’s not enough!” And they’re right, it’s not enough – but that’s what we do – because often we’re hate and sadness, ingratitude and sin. And that’s why God doesn’t measure his loyal love, his compassion against our love, but against his own. “Jesus loves me this much” – if only that were wide enough. How do I express in hand gestures giving one’s own Son in death for worthless people to make them worthy treasures? That’s how immense God’s stockpiles of loyal love are for you every day. They never run out. His love is everlasting, which means it will be there as long as you are.

While my parents were here, my father had my car washed. He put on my rearview mirror a “New Car Smell” tree. Now, why do we do that? Why do we go back to “new car” smell? Maybe it’s because we value what’s new. Children of God, please cherish the burden of mercy. Take stock of and value the new mercies. You have a new day, every day that exists – new in its possibilities for living in love for God and for sharing faith. We’ve been given so many gifts, by which we can exercise our faith – a new budget for ministry, free-time at home, love to share. And we’ve been given challenges too, but their part of mercy – maybe that the thing you wanted to happen didn’t, or that what you didn’t want to happen did – either way it’s for good reason, because it’s God’s reason. Maybe instead, it’s that all of the good things you thought

(Continued on Page 3)

(Continued from page 2)

were making life so easy are gone, and now life will be hard – or in reality it will just be less focus on you and more focus on God. Whatever mercies you experience cherish them, because they all show us how little we are and how great our God is – they point us back to him.

A few months ago Pastor asked the church council to list blessings from God one night. We listed about ten wonderful things. Then Pastor asked us where the hard blessings were – the troubles and financial shortfalls, the pains and sorrows. They weren't there. But they should be. The burden we carry in life is really God's love. Acknowledge It because we don't deserve anything like mercy. Cherish It because "the Lord is good to those who hope in him (Lam 3:25)." You are Burdened with Mercy. According to Paul, this is how the burden looks when you consider the treasure

God has made your life: "The light trouble of this moment is preparing for us an everlasting weight of glory, greater than anything we can imagine (2 Cor 4:17)."

Philip Casmer is serving as vicar at Apostles Evangelical Lutheran Church in Billings, Montana. For contact information, please visit us at www.apostlesmt.net.



This Week's Announcements

YOUTH OUTING- The college students from our sister congregation in Bozeman are planning a youth outing on August 4th and 5th. This is an excellent opportunity for both parents and our young adults to relax before the school year and get to know other Christians in our state. Please look at the poster in the entry for more information and contact Pastor with any questions. Those who are entering 6th grade to 12th grade are invited. The retreat is North of Livingston.

WITNESS WEBSITE- WhatAboutJesus.com is completely redesigned! This website produced by the WELS Commission on Evangelism is your outreach tool! Visit it yourself or point your unchurched friends, relatives, co-workers, and neighbors to learn about Jesus. Features include: daily devotions, Sunday worship helps, Q & A for those learning about Jesus, and numerous articles and Bible studies on many diverse subjects. Come take a look for yourself!

ADULT VACATION BIBLE SCHOOL- This year the adults are going to focus on the book of first John. We will dig into the history and examine closely the doctrine of church fellowship. Please join us starting August 3rd and meeting for three more Thursday's following. The class will meet from 7-8:30 p.m. August 3, 10, 17 and 24.

VICAR CASMER'S FAREWELL- Please notice the sign-up sheet in the entry concerning Vicar Casmer's Farewell Party. The main meal will be catered and the rest will be supplied by the members. If there are any questions please contact Angie Besler.

WOMEN'S CONFERENCE- WELS/ELS Women's Conference will be held in Salt Lake City on September 22-24. The topic of the conference will be Mormon outreach. Information is posted in the Narthex. Registration for the conference is now open.

LADIES GUILD- There will be no Ladies Guild meeting on Monday, July 3. The next meeting will be September 11.

VACATION BIBLE SCHOOL- On July 24th we will begin Vacation Bible School. Vicar Casmer will be organizing the program this year under the theme, "The Great Rescue." He is looking for volunteers to assist. Please speak with Vicar if you are willing and able. You can listen to pastor's interview with Tommy B. (AM970) online.

MOWING- A mowing crew has been hired to care for the immediate lawn around the church. However, it is necessary that we as God's stewards also mow the large field. We are blessed with a riding lawn mower in the shed and are asking individuals to give of their time to do some mowing. Please speak to Pastor or Kirk Cooper if you are willing to help.

VALLEY VIEW LUTHERAN CHURCH in Helena will be celebrating its 25th anniversary this summer on Sunday, July 23. We wish to invite all of you to join us in this celebration. On that day we will have a special worship service at 3 p.m. Pastor John Engel, who served our congregation in the late 1970's, will be the guest preacher. The service will be followed by a meal. Consider joining us in praising our Lord for granting us 25 years of blessings!

Apostles Evangelical Lutheran Church
Billings, Montana

Worship Services Sunday at 10:30 a.m. and Monday at 6:30 p.m.

Sunday School and **Adult Bible Classes** Sunday at 9:15 a.m.

Men's Bible Study Monday morning at 6:30 a.m.

Women's Study Tuesday morning at 10:00 a.m.

Contact the pastor at (406) 656-7141 about the opportunities to join a **Bible Information Class**.

More information and resources are available on our website at www.apostlesmt.net or by contacting the church office at (406) 656-7141.

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Inside: This Week's Sermon

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