

The Third Sunday after Trinity

Micah 7:18-20

June 28, 2020

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Who is a God like you? That's Micah's question in today's first reading. It's a common question, in and out of Scripture. It's often asked with accusation and anger, tears and rage.

Who is a God like You,

- *Allowing ethnic grievances to fester?*
- *Letting a virus strike fear into the hearts of many?*
- *Sitting idly, as children are dismembered in their mother's womb?*
- *Silent as chaos and hatred spread?*
- *Why, O Lord, do You not act? Why do You not answer?*

God made this world beautiful. Yet everything ends in pain and sorrow. We hide it away, pretending it isn't true. Although we're no longer allowed inside, the hospitals and funeral homes reek with the stench of mortality. Florists and antiseptic cleaning agents battle each day to stifle the odors that would otherwise cause us to gasp and heave. God's creation has become hell on earth: Broken hearts, shattered souls, cancerous tumors filling the gut; minds crippled by fear, souls gripped with sorrow, and mouths that can only utter the name of God as a curse. Jobs are lost as rioters engage in a thousand little *Kristallnachts*. Good is evil, and evil good. A statue of Lincoln freeing a slave is now racist. "Girls will be boys, and boys will be girls / It's a mixed up, muddled up, shook up world." It's tempting to despair. Who is a God like You, allowing Your creation to be thus ruined?

His answer, for now, is what is recorded in the Gospels. He says, "I am a God who pardons iniquity." "You, My child, are My lost coin. I have searched for you amid the dust and spiders; into every dark corner I have gone, casting the bright beams of My light. You were covered with filth, but I found you; you were slippery with urine and puss, but I grasped you and washed you, polished you and restored you to a place of honor. You, My child, are My lost sheep. All the darkness that has come upon your race began when your first father fled. And you, you too have run from Me. You listened to the voices of others. The voice of your Shepherd you thought boring and prudish. But still I searched for you. I cried out, although the night was pitch, like tar; and the storms were fierce. The wild beasts snarled; they bared their teeth and flashed their sharp claws, and death itself as a monster loomed. Yet I searched for you and found you."

He loves the rebels and the forlorn. To Him, these are lost coins and lost sheep. The Lord wants the prodigals, the rioters, and even such sinners as you and me back. The prophet Micah gives us by revelation what we could never conclude from nature. "*Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression?*" God is not Anger and Mercy as two equal parts, two doctrines that form a single coin with two sides. No, "*He does not retain His anger forever.*" Anger, the Word of God tells us, is not intrinsic to God's nature. It is not who He is. What did we hear from St. John a few weeks ago? "*God is love.*" So, "*He does not retain His anger forever, because He delights in steadfast love.*"

Psalm 111[:4] says, "*He hath made his wonderful works to be remembered: the LORD is gracious and full of compassion.*" On these beautiful words, Dr. Luther commented:

The Psalmist does not refer to God simply as God or Lord, but as gracious and merciful Lord. For the very names 'God' and 'Lord' are intrinsically rather terrifying because these names refer to His Majesty. However, the epithets 'gracious' and 'merciful' contain nothing but solace and joy. And I cannot think of a single line in Scripture where God is described more

beautifully. Give Him no other name in your heart and remember Him as such in your conscience. Otherwise you will be unjust to Him and will most grievously insult Him and you will also bring the greatest harm on yourself (...) For His essential nature is to do good; anger is something alien and is not one of His works.

Look at how much of today's OT reading is in the future. "*He will again have compassion on us; He will tread our iniquities under foot. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea. You will show faithfulness to Jacob and steadfast love to Abraham.*" This is what will take place. Now, we wait. Here we sit in this storm-tossed boat, fearful at each crash of thunder and flash of lightning. Here we sit in the hospital, looking at a shell of a human being, crying and wondering, "Why?!" Here we sit with stomachs twisted in knots, writhing in pain, hiding in shame. Here we sit in the funeral home, choked with flowers staring at a corpse caked in cosmetic fakery. Here we stand at Arlington cemetery, beholding row after row after row after endless row of fallen soldiers. And none of it makes sense.

Then here we sit in the church, looking at a derelict, itinerant Jew hanging, starved of breath, His life spent. But we sit here on a Sunday, the day of resurrection. We see in the crucifix the Crucified One—for He is forever the Crucified One—He kicked death in the teeth and said, "You lose."

That's the only answer as we sit with Job on this world's dunghills. For we know, amidst all the pain and loss and heartache, that He is coming again, coming again for us lost coins and lost sheep, coming for us rebels who have squandered much. He is coming again even to the graves, and He will roar like a lion once more at death and say, "You lose." And rising again, on His shoulder we are gently laid, as home rejoicing He brings us. +INJ+

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

Rev. Christopher S. Esget
Pastor, Immanuel Evangelical-Lutheran Church
Alexandria, Virginia