

Misericordias Domini plena est terra (Ps. 33:5b: The World is full of the goodness/love/mercy of the Lord)

But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions-- it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith-- and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (Eph 2:4-10 NIV)

We're living in the joyful time after Easter. Christ has risen from the dead, he's risen indeed. Hence we as members of his body and the holy Christian Church are also living all together in his wonderful light of life and salvation. That's why we confess and sing joyfully and gratefully: *Misericordias Domini plena est terra!* (The earth is full of God's goodness) Hallelujahs predominate. Praise and thanksgiving abound and we are all called upon to rejoice in this glorious festive season of Easter – it's a holiday of jubilation, celebration and grateful song lasting not just a few weeks, but always really – year in, year out. It's not only for daily blessings of God's creation – food and sustenance, protection from all evil and fatherly goodness and mercy, with which he carries and maintains us from day to day. It's not only for the once off and all availing sacrifice of his only begotten son, the lamb of God, IX on the cross of Golgotha and his glorious resurrection at Easter and how he overcome sin, death and devil once and for all for us and all mankind – to live and reign eternally: Hallelujah + Here in the letter to the Ephesians it is also about this objective miracle and wonder becoming ours – yours and mine – our very own - through the wonderful work of the Holy Spirit – through his wonderful and effective means of grace – word and sacrament in his church. Our subjective justification – our very own personal salvation – how he brought us, who can't believe and are so distrustful - to believe and trust solely in IX our Lord and God – in his goodness and mercy, which fills the entire earth, the cosmos – way beyond what we can see and perceive.

This however is also the time and rightful season to hear that other and final part of the story: We are God's handiwork, created in IX to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. This is our calling – to do good works. Works, which are in accord with his most holy will and that truly benefit our family and friends, our neighbours and colleagues, but also our compatriots and fellow-citizens – people we meet every day and those that we come across now and again or but once off. We're called upon to serve, to do good and to make a positive difference where we are and with what we have and can do. Be light and salt of the world. Live as God's own and heirs of the heavenly kingdom.

Now look at your position and station in life – as teacher or student at LTS, as brother or house inhabitator/indweller of Mdluli or Luther House, as local SA or as visitor and migrant, being man or women, man or women, parent or child. Enriching each other, sharing, what we have and can and promoting each other to become what we ought to be in the sight of God. Hospitable, friendly, encouraging, edifying, positively uplifting and promoting, advancing and developing, building and helping. Something like Prof Nordling doing on his visit here or Ashenafi in the USA. Or Pastor Mntambo and his wife. Or MaBhengu and the deaconesses. It's not so much about navel-gazing – curvatus in se as we were already unborn in our mother's womb – but rather uncoiled, released, saved to look beyond ourselves towards IX – the author and perfecter of our faith – him, our Lord and our God, our brother and friend - perceiving, trusting and hoping in his goodness, forgiveness and mercy and then also looking to our fellow-human, our brothers and sisters beyond family bonds, tribal connections, racial ties, national affinities – see them as siblings of the very same father and God – realizing their needs, perceiving who most urgently needs our compassion and care, attention and help.

How is this possible? How does this happen? Well – first of all we're in quite a conundrum. For the malady is this, that we were all dead in transgressions. Luther: What do we bring/add to our salvation? Sin and opposition. Pride and boasting. Enmity and hatred – self-centeredness and unwillingness to serve, but rather seeking to lord it over others and get away with more and more for ourselves – never mind the others. Believing ourselves to be masters of the universe. That holds

true for Jews and also for Greeks and Japanese – then and now. For Europeans and Africans. For Nigerians and South Africans. There is no difference. They are all sinners and lack the godly righteousness, that they ought to have – and the bad fruits of that still stick with us even here and now – not really fruit at all, but rather thorns, briars, weeds and good-for-nothings – not even a proper fire.

Yet God did not just let us be and go on with our lives in this sinful and godless way. No - the good shepherd – sought us out, drew us out of our calamity and captivity to make us alive in Christ – he raised us up with Christ – brought us home, healed us and made us whole - seated us with him in the heavenly realms. The lost son – and also the elder brother, who had always stayed at home. – both are redeemed, saved, forgiven, reinstated, healed – one happy family. He – the Father shows us his incomparable riches of grace, his kindness, grace – all the marvellous gifts from God. It's what Baptism is all about. Drowning and dying to our sinfulness and being raised up with Christ by the work of the Father together with the Holy Ghost as new creation ready and enabled and empowered to live as his very own dear people. He feeds and cares us with heavenly food and divine sustenance to keep us going – in the true faith, faithfully, lovingly and mercifully - here and to eternity – with those around us – deserving or not. That's what daily bread and the Lord Supper is all about. He feeds us with goodness and mercy, so that we to can share goodness and mercy. He doesn't let us go, but calls us back to him and his source of goodness, life and mercy – in daily confession and absolution, crawling back to the font and erecting us to the life in him and his goodness. No longer just serving ourselves in pride and prejudice, in boasting and bragging way beyond any reasonable and justified measure and godly standard, but rather in humility and kindness doing what is right, meet and salutary. No longer striving to be God and masters over others, but rather praising God's goodness and sharing what he has given to us – serving with a willing and loving and caring heart - seeing that our own cup is truly overflowing with godly richness and divine blessings. For see the earth is full of God's goodness and mercy + for us and all people + There's enough for all – not just for some select few on the gravy train, while others fall off hungry, starving or are pushed off even to drown – short of reaching the goal of their ambitions and hopes on the Mediterranean. cf Christians drowned by Muslims on the way.

God did it with St. Paul – converted him from a ferocious persecutor of the church to make him a missionary of the Church. Was that not written for us as an example? The worst sinner becoming the greatest teacher and missionary of the Church – after Christ. Are we not tempted to write off the Muslim extremist as hopeless cases? Can we not see that God wants them too to repent of their evil ways and have them turned around and come to the insight of his gracious truth and the wholesome recognition and saving trust in Jesus Christ as their only Lord and saviour? The only truth, the only way to God – not just Allah the just, but the good and gracious, loving and forgiving Father of Jesus Christ and of all people, sinners all. Well, see IX died for us while we were still enemies too. That's grace. That's love. That's mercy and overflowing goodness. For there are no hopeless cases in God's sight. Not even that homosexual back home and in your village and in his tight and captivating closet. He's not to be condemned and stoned or beheaded or necklaced or correctively raped, but rather invited to God's gracious goodness and mercy, which calls the lost son home and dresses him in cloths of righteousness and justice, covers his impurity and unchastity with Christ's forgiving purity and chastity: "Jesus, thy blood and righteousness my beauty are my glorious dress!" (LSB 563)

Obviously this is not our doing. That's God's business. We can't even save ourselves, but we can testify to God's goodness and mercy. We can confess his grace and forgiveness. Point to him and invite to him, not standing in the way, not disqualifying, condemning and excluding, but rather making the paths level and opening the doors and gates and crying: Come, taste the goodness and friendliness of our God. It's mahala – it's for the little ones too and the poor even. Nobody needs to stay outside – no widow, no orphan, no foreigner or sojourner. Come for the Lord is good and his mercy endures for ever. His loving care and tender kindness, with which he calls, gathers, enlightens, saves, forgives, heals, restores, blesses and keeps us with and in IX – now and always – fills the entire world and especially his holy Church: ***Misericordias Domini plena est terra et ecclessia.*** Amen.

1. Thy works, not mine, O Christ, Speak gladness to this heart; They tell me all is done, They bid my fear depart. To whom save Thee, who canst alone For sin atone, Lord, shall I flee?

2. Thy wounds, not mine, O Christ, Can heal my bruised soul; Thy stripes, not mine, contain The balm that makes me whole. To whom save Thee, who canst alone For sin atone, Lord, shall I flee?

3. Thy cross, not mine, O Christ, Has borne the awe-full load Of sins that none could bear But the incarnate God. To whom save Thee, who canst alone For sin atone, Lord, shall I flee?

4. Thy death, not mine, O Christ, Has paid the ransom due; Ten thousand deaths like mine Would have been all too few. To whom save Thee, who canst alone For sin atone, Lord, shall I flee?

5. Thy righteousness, O Christ, Alone can cover me; No righteousness avails Save that which is of Thee. To whom save Thee, who canst alone For sin atone, Lord, shall I flee?

Hymn #380 The Lutheran Hymnal Text: Phil. 3:9 Author: Horatius Bonar, 1857