

Let Them Hear: Lord, Have Mercy!

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

Lord, have mercy!

We pray these words, “Lord, have mercy!” every week in the service. These words we sing are really a prayer; a prayer of faith that the Lord does have mercy on us, because he has promised to do so. We pray these words because we know we can. We trust that this prayer is answered by our merciful God. We take comfort and trust in these words, because this is what we have been given in God’s Word, the promise and gift of mercy, the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation to be with him eternally in heaven.

To the unbeliever, or to those who doubt God’s mercy, these words, “Lord, have mercy!” are not prayed in confidence. These words can’t even be said, because these people have rejected God’s mercy.

In our Gospel reading we see a rich man who, after going through the suffering and torment of God’s wrath after his death, pleads for mercy. His plea is just for a temporary relief with a quench of the tongue. Even in his suffering he doesn’t trust God’s mercy. This man is not suffering because he was rich but he is being tormented because he trusted upon himself rather than trusting upon God in his mercy.

He probably worked hard to accumulate the riches that he had. But do you think throughout his life that he recognized the gifts he had as gifts from God? The many blessings this man had, as he wore his fine linen clothing, the clothes of royalty, or as he sumptuously feasted on fine foods to nourish his body, were indeed gifts of the Lord. But did he know it?

The indication here is no, based on this man’s actions, and confirmed by Jesus as he tells us of this man’s damnation. This rich man is really nothing but a rich fool. For his life and his

comfort is fully dependant upon himself. He trusted in his riches to always be there for him, for his wealth to continuously provide for everything that he needs. He sees nothing wrong in life and seems to have everything that he could ever want.

This is something that all people do, that all people struggle with. How often have we wished to be in the situation that this man is in? Or how often do we ourselves take comfort in our things? How often do we think to ourselves, oh things would be so much easier if only we had more money or if only we had this or that? And how often are we comforted knowing that things are going ok because we have saved up a nice little nest egg, or because we know we have a big raise or bonus upcoming? We are easily comforted in our own possessions and in our own accomplishments.

Do you see how easy it is to be like the rich man? We do it all the time,. We work so hard for the things that we accomplish, we work hard at our jobs to have these things, and we work hard to even get such a job and have hopes for a better one to come. And it is so easy to make these things the source of our comfort and to make these things our identity.

Not that there is anything necessarily wrong with these things in and of themselves. After all, hard work is necessary to accomplish anything, and needed to provide for the necessities of life. But these are blessings of God. These things are not our comfort and our identity. The things on earth are not the extent of the blessings that we receive; they are not our good things to come.

The good things that we are to receive come only from our Lord. We have these things now, not because we have done anything to deserve them but because we have been promised them by God on account of Christ.

We cannot take comfort in our own actions and in our own possessions and accomplishments. In these things, no comfort is to be found. Our own actions lead us to doubt God's Word and promises and cause us to depend upon ourselves, and lead us to sin. Our possessions are earthly and do not last, our accomplishments will pass by – and all aspects of our lives are tainted by our sin.

Even if we have been blessed here on earth like the rich man, because of our sin we are all really like Lazarus. Poor, miserable, and begging. This we confess in our confession of sins in the Divine Service. This is why we are in need of God's mercy, that we beg even for the scraps from the Lord's Table, because we have nothing. But we "poor, miserable sinners" receive and take comfort in the gift of Christ, who gives us his eternal feast, of his body and blood, to give us forgiveness and faith in him.

Unbelief and the rejection of this mercy has nothing to take comfort in, so it clings to the things of this world and people trust in themselves, in their abilities and in their wealth, rather in Christ. And the result is eternal torment and damnation in God's wrath.

The rich man after suffering in torment does not want to see his loved ones suffering under this same torment. So he begs to have Lazarus sent to his brothers, to tell them and lead them to repentance. Abraham points out to the rich man that they will still reject God's mercy, as the rich man has. He knows of God's mercy, as he knows of Father Abraham, and still did not trust in it. Like the rich man, his brothers have already been given this gift of mercy. They have Moses and the prophets, God's Word and promises, but they have rejected these things.

And so it is for the rich man, his brothers, Lazarus, and for all those around as Jesus spoke these words. And so it is for you. Since the fall of man into sin, God in his Word has given us his promises. And to you he has promised the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. God has

given us these promises and has given us these gifts and continues to give us these blessings as he gives us his proclaimed Word that gives us forgiveness.

Abraham says the rich man's brothers will continue to reject God's mercy, even if one comes who has been raised from the dead, and that they will continue to not believe. This is shown still today. God has always promised the resurrection and has always promised eternal life for his people, all people. That we have forgiveness, that we have eternal life, is what Christ tells all people, in this reading today and throughout all the Gospels. And after his suffering and death, he was raised from the dead on third day. And yet, still people did not and do not believe.

So let them hear Moses and the prophets, let them hear all of God's Word. Let them hear the crucified, resurrected, and living Christ who alone gives comfort because he alone gives the forgiveness of sins. He is the promised Savior that Abraham, Moses, and the prophets trusted in. He is the Word made flesh, who suffered and died on the cross for you, so that you may have your sins forgiven, so that you will have eternal life with him in paradise.

We cannot put our trust in ourselves, but we can trust in what we have been given. We can't put our trust in ourselves or our worldly possessions, but we can put our trust in the true God who loves us, sent his Son to die for us and earned us eternal life by his death and resurrection, that we have life alongside Abraham and all the saints. We have been given the Holy Spirit in our baptism, who brings us into Christ, and brings us so that we may hear the Word of God. We cling to our baptism because of what is given to us, faith in Christ who clothes us with the finest clothes of righteousness and gives us the forgiveness of sins.

So let them and let us hear and taste the Word of God made flesh, as he gives us his very own body and blood, given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. Let them hear Moses and the prophets, who tells of God's promises in Jesus Christ through whom God continues to

show mercy. Let us hear the words of our Savior who says his sacrifice on the cross is for you, for the forgiveness of sins.

Let us hear, so that with all boldness and confidence we can pray, Lord, have mercy! Knowing that God in his Word has promised us his mercy. He gives you – a poor, miserable, sinner – Christ. He gives you forgiveness. He gives you righteousness. And he gives us life eternally. It is by his Word and these promises and these gifts that we have comfort – that we have will continue to receive our good things to come, life with him forever rather than the eternal torment that we deserve.

Thanks be to God that he has given his only Son to die for us, and forgives us of our sins. And by this mercy that we have in Christ we show mercy. We see the beggar, the ones who have wounds and are licked by dogs and we can show mercy to all of God's people. We can show mercy because we have been given mercy. Let us hear the Word of God, that by it and in it your sins are forgiven and are declared righteous just as Abraham, Moses, the prophets, Lazarus, and all the saints who have gone before us. You have this by the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who gives you the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation.

May the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep our hearts and our minds in the mercy of Christ Jesus. Amen.