

How Would You Do It?

“O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable are His ways!” (Romans 11:33, Modern English Version)

During Advent (advent means “coming”), we start the new church year much like we ended the previous church year – looking for the final coming of Jesus on the Last Day. During Advent, though, we also prepare our hearts to celebrate His coming that first Christmas to save the world – all while also remembering that He continues to come among us with His grace through the Word and Sacraments. And see, the Lord’s Second Coming reminds us that this world is going to end. It also reminds us that there will be a day of judgment.

And Judgment Day bothers many people. The thought that our loving Creator would send a person to Hell is more than some people are able to accept intellectually and emotionally. Therefore the Biblical teaching about Hell is doubted and ignored by many people. They see everlasting condemnation as being something that God could not do if He is a God of love. After all, many (perhaps even most) human beings would not have the stomach to send someone to Hell (even though ironically people say “damn you” all the time) – so how could God, some argue, ever do so?

Well, the obvious (and correct) response is that you and I are not God. We have no way of understanding what it’s like to have all knowledge and all power – let alone what it would be like to be perfectly good and to never have a thought or action that is evil. Added to that, God is infinite and we are finite. He knows the past and present in a way that we cannot, and He even knows the future (which we are unable to apprehend). Therefore, you and I have no concept of what it would be like to think or act like God, let alone judge as He would.

See, you and I often are quick to judge God. But what we need to ask ourselves is how *we* would handle things when it comes to judgment. Should no one go to Hell? Should there be no final judgment? How about the monstrously wicked figures throughout history, let alone those from our recent past? It’s pretty much agreed upon that the tyrants Mao Zedong and Joseph Stalin killed millions of people. Do their barbarous murders not matter? Should there be no justice? How about our culture’s poster child for evil, the notorious Adolph Hitler – does he get a free pass? And if it could be conceded that folks like these whom I’ve just mentioned actually do deserve Hell and ought to be divinely judged, then what other exceptions ought to be (or have to be) made? Who else deserves to be judged and punished eternally for the bad things they have done? Does one have to pillage, harm, or kill a certain number of people before being judged and punished, or is all stealing, maiming, and murdering wrong? And how is each transgression to be judged? Who decides? Who is qualified to decide?

See, if you and I ask ourselves how *we* would handle things, the complexity of it all quickly becomes clear. No wonder human beings have struggled for millennia when it comes to making and enforcing the laws that guide and direct daily life on this planet. And individuals often disagree with one another when it comes to right and wrong, and how to apply justice. Yet, we human beings seem to think that we have the right to judge God – even though we do not possess all

knowledge, all power, and all righteousness. Some even contend that they are more wise and good than the One who has revealed Himself in Holy Scripture. But our own inability to even come close to devising a plan that looks like perfect justice in this world should serve to remind us that we truly are out of line in thinking that we can actually judge God. For ***“His judgments”*** are ***“unsearchable.”***

And as we are told in the Bible, God’s love for us is also beyond our comprehension. For because He is perfectly holy and just, God cannot be partial or biased when it comes to judging. He also cannot ignore evil or be indifferent toward it. Nevertheless, He desires to be gracious and merciful toward us. And Holy Scripture reveals that even before mankind sinned that God had planned to lovingly save you and me from everlasting perdition. And He fulfilled this plan through His advent into this world that first Christmas. But again, many scoff at this teaching as well. Some claim that it’s silly to believe that God could (or would) become human and be born of a virgin. Others think that such an idea is merely a spin-off story originating in pagan mythology. Still others outright doubt that the advent of Jesus of Nazareth could ever make us right with God. And the objections go on and on.

But once again, those who reject God’s plan of salvation likewise need to be asked how *they* would do it. How would they deliver mankind from all the evil and affliction that confront us in this world? How would they remove human guilt and cleanse the corrupt soul? Many people lay the blame for suffering and death at God’s doorstep, yet after thousands of years, even with all the technological strides that have been made, mankind has failed to conquer suffering or death. Man has not figured out how to correct his corrupt and inwardly curved nature – he has been unable to overcome his moral failings.

Again, what is *our* great plan? Every man-made philosophy and religion teaches that human beings must, by their own efforts, do or become something to deliver themselves from the problems of this life. But what must be done? What objectives are to be met? And who gets to decide what those objectives are and when they are met? What if I lack the time, ability, or resources to accomplish them? Could the works of a finite and imperfect sinner like myself ever prove adequate – especially when I demonstrate everyday that I continuously fail to perfectly love and therefore deserve Divine judgment?

Again, human thoughts and plans leave as many questions as they answer. Our deliverance strategies create as many problems as they solve – they lead to dead ends instead of open doors. In fact, the lack of consensus, certainty, and hope expressed by adherents of man-made philosophies and religions serve to show us that our fallen reason and corrupt nature are unable to concoct a successful plan to rescue mankind. For after trying to save himself for millennia, man’s efforts have produced nothing solid upon which to hang his hat. Our human frailty reminds us again and again that we truly come up short when thinking that we understand either justice or grace better than the living God who has revealed Himself in the Bible. All we do is look arrogant when we act as if we know better than the Lord. For ***“His ways”*** are ***“unfathomable.”***

My friends, sin is the cause of our problems – it is the one (and only) comprehensive explanation that applies from age to age. For we are all sinful and deserve everlasting punishment from the

pure and perfect Judge of the universe. Yet only God can save us from sin. And God, just as He had promised beforehand to our first parents, came into this world as one of us, a human being, our brother, to overcome sin, death, and the devil – thus reconciling us with Himself. For God’s sinless Son miraculously took our flesh and was born to a virgin named Mary. The Judge came to suffer the sentence that Divine justice demands from us. See, God saved us while never ignoring justice. He is both **“just, and the justifier” (Romans 3:26, KJV)**. God cannot be accused of being unfair or of being unloving. He is absolutely just and absolutely gracious. For He has fully punished the sins of the whole world. How? By enduring the punishment of Hell that we deserve – and doing so in our flesh and in our place. For Jesus suffered and died on the cross as our substitute, and then bodily rose again in victory three days later. This is why Jesus came into the world that first Christmas. He came to be charged with our sin and guilt – He came to bear the consequences of our rebellion for us. And in so doing, Jesus restored that unending life and relationship with God which had originally been given to our first parents at creation but was lost when they disobeyed God. Is this salvation account miraculous and beyond full human comprehension? Yes. Is it nonsense? Of course not. It is the truth and the best news ever!

See, when it comes to salvation, God must do all the work. And that He did at the cross where He paid for the sins of all people. And through His Means of Grace, He does all the work of distributing His salvation to us – giving us His forgiveness and unending life, along with the gift of faith to receive this deliverance.

My friends, we human beings will always fall far short when it comes to trying to judge the Judge and when it comes to trying to out-deliver the Deliverer. So, instead of judging God and trying to earn our salvation, through the Spirit’s work in our lives, we **“repent and believe in the gospel” (Mark 1:15, ESV)**. And through God-given faith we rejoice in our God and Savior’s advent – His coming that first Christmas, His coming in Word and Sacrament among us now, and His promised coming on the Last Day. For Christians understand that even though **“the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God”** far exceeds them, yet **“the Lord is near” (Philippians 4:5b, NIV)**. For we don’t have to be able to comprehend, explain, or defend all of God’s ways. All we need is Jesus. So, we trust God’s Son – knowing that **“He has done all things well” (Mark 7:37a, ESV)**.

Blessed Adventtide,
Pastor

Shay and I and our family wish each of you God’s blessings throughout Advent, and a healthy and joyous Christmas Season ~ Pastor.

PS – I hope that you were able to read through the daily Psalm readings over the course of the past church year. If you steadfastly followed the daily Psalter lectionary provided in the monthly newsletters and weekly bulletins, you read through all the Psalms twice. This Psalm lectionary

will not be provided in the newsletters and bulletins this church year, but I am working on a lectionary with daily readings from the Old and New Testaments that I hope to share with you sometime in the future. Nevertheless, I encourage you to keep reading the Psalms every day. And in case you are unaware, our weekly bulletin insert has a wonderful schedule for daily Bible reading – it's at the very bottom of the page on the side of the sheet that has the Introit, the Prayer of the Day, and the Gradual. I probably won't be preaching on texts from the Psalms as frequently as I have this past year, but I'm sure that I occasionally will select a Psalm for the sermon text. In fact, I'll be preaching on Psalm texts throughout this Advent Season and on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. Thanks be to God for His Psalter ~ Pastor.