

Holy Cross, Daggett and St. Mark, Wallace Lutheran Churches, Michigan

December 29, 2013

Isaiah 63:7-9

I will tell of the kindnesses of the LORD, the deeds for which he is to be praised, according to all the LORD has done for us-- yes, the many good things he has done for the house of Israel, according to his compassion and many kindnesses. He said, "Surely they are my people, sons who will not be false to me"; and so he became their Savior. In all their distress he too was distressed, and the angel of his presence saved them. In his love and mercy he redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old.

Have you ever seen the end of the year cartoon with the old man and the baby? I think most of us have. It is the cartoon where the two years meet. Each of them has a sash around their chests. The old man has the old year on his sash. The young baby has the new year on his sash. The two meet and pass one year off to another. The message of the cartoon is fairly clear. The new year begins with such promise and excitement, but by the end of the year we can feel weighed down and tired.

Can you relate to this cartoon at all? I can. I can really relate to the old man in this picture this year. Christmas is a busy time of the year. It is filled with fun and family. This past week has been a week of fun and excitement, but all the excitement can lead to a crash back to reality. The days are short. Lately, it seems like we haven't seen much of the sun. We can't go outside for very long since the weather has been numbingly cold and this week promises to get much colder. We slow down and feel like giving up.

How are we able to keep moving? Is it by our own will and desire? Or is it because someone has carried us along? Isaiah gives us an answer, **"I will tell of the kindnesses of the LORD, the deeds for which he is to be praised, according to all the LORD has done for us-- yes, the many good things he has done for the house of Israel, according to his compassion and many kindnesses. He said, 'Surely they are my people, sons who will not be false to me'; and so he became their Savior."**

"In all their distress he too was distressed, and the angel of his presence saved them. In his love and mercy he redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old." Isaiah reminds us that God has redeemed us and rescued us. He reminds us it is gut-wrenching for God to see us suffer. What makes it so gut-wrenching for God? He has reached out to buy us back from sin, death and the devil with his love and compassion.

We celebrate this love and compassion going into action at Christmas. Our second lesson points us to God's love and compassion in action. It says, **"But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, 'Abba, Father.' So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir."**

God's love and compassion has made us God's heirs. God sent his one and only son at just the right time to come and buy us back from sin, death and the devil. Jesus came into this world to set us free so we could become his children. Why did God show us this love and compassion? Why did Jesus come into the world at just the right time for us? Was it because of something we did? Was it because we are deserving of it?

No. It wasn't because of anything we have done. It is because of his love and compassion that God has done this for us. **"He said, 'Surely they are my people, sons who will not be false to me'; and so he became their Savior. In all their distress he too was distressed, and the angel of his presence saved them. In his love and mercy he redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old."**

We were once dead in our transgressions and sins. We didn't want anything to do with God at all. Salvation wasn't even an option for us. However, God in his love and compassion reached out to us. He sent his one and only son into this world to buy us back and make us his children. He did this simply because he loves us. There is no other reason. There is no other explanation. His love is the only reason he did this for us.

What will this love he has shown us lead us to do? **"I will tell of the kindnesses of the LORD, the deeds for which he is to be praised, according to all the LORD has done for us-- yes, the many good things he has done for the house of Israel, according to his compassion and many kindnesses."** This loving kindness and compassion of the Lord, the fact he has bought us back from sin death and the devil without our doing or asking, will lead us to tell of God's kindness for sinners.

Who will we tell about this kindness? Why will we tell them of God's kindness? My why question is the easier question to answer. We will tell of God's kindness to encourage people. Short and simple. Who will we tell? This question has two answers. We need to tell of God's kindness to encourage ourselves and to encourage others. We'll get to the others part, but first I want to talk about why we need to speak of God's kindness for our own encouragement.

Why do we need to tell ourselves about God's kindness for our own encouragement? I want to go back to my opening example of the old man exiting for the new year. Think about your year last year. Was it good? Was it bad? I'm sure there were many good points, but we live in a world filled with sin and sin can make life tough at times. Sin has brought pain and suffering into this world. It has brought death and disease into this world. It has brought anger and frustration into this world.

Sin has brought selfishness and self-centeredness into this world. We've all experienced these things in different ways this past year. Some of us have had loved ones die and we miss them. Some of us have had cancer strike our bodies or the bodies of ones we love. We have been disappointed by people who think only of themselves rather than us. We have disappointed and hurt others because we have only thought about ourselves rather than others.

All of these hurts, disappointments and troubles add up. They weigh us down. They wear us out. They make us question God's loving compassion and kindness. This doubt which is created in our heart is the reason we need the encouragement of God's loving kindness for us. Doubt is a sin. It robs us of comfort because it destroys our trust in God. Satan uses the disappointments, troubles and hurts of this world to feed our doubt to draw us away from God.

How can we encourage our souls? **"I will tell of the kindnesses of the LORD, the deeds for which he is to be praised, according to all the LORD has done for us-- yes, the many good things he has done for the house of Israel, according to his compassion and many kindnesses. He said, 'Surely they are my people, sons who will not be false to me'; and so he became their Savior. In all their distress he too was distressed, and the angel of his presence saved them."**

"In his love and mercy he redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old." We need to encourage ourselves by remind ourselves of the kindness God has shown us. Jesus has died to

forgive our sin of doubt. He did this not because of anything we had done, but because of who we are. We are sinners in desperate need of rescue and redemption. This is the reason Jesus came into the world. He came to save us and give us the gift of eternal life in heaven.

The promise of heaven lifts us and sustains us. It encourages us when sin makes life hard and makes us feel like giving up. It is why we speak of God's loving kindness. His compassion and mercy mean that he loved us enough to make us his children and give us eternal life in heaven. We need this encouragement every day because sin and Satan attack us every day. They wear us down and make us tired.

We aren't the only ones who need this encouragement. Once we have been encouraged it means it is time for us to encourage others. Do you know anyone who is struggling and doubting God loves him? Do you know anyone who is burdened by her load of sin and is becoming tired in her faith? Are your children or grandchildren having a difficult time believing God's kindness is for them? What should you do for these people?

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"In his love and mercy he redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old." Tell them of the kindness of the Lord. Tell them of the kindness of the Lord and how he hasn't abandoned us. Tell them of the kindness of the Lord and the importance of staying close to Jesus because their spiritual enemies are constantly attacking them. Do you know what the best part about this encouragement is? We'll be reminded of God's kindness to us when we do it. Amen.