

# Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

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February 5, 2006  
5<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Epiphany  
Psalm 103  
Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: Job 7:1-7  
Psalm of the Day: Psalm 103  
Second Lesson: 1 Corinthians 9:16-23  
Gospel: Mark 1:29-39

## Forget Not All His Benefits

What do you do to help yourself remember things that are important? Do you tie a string to your finger? Do you get those little yellow square things with that sticky stuff on them and stick them all around you with notes on them? Do you carry a “to do” list in your pocket or an organizer? Do you have a PDA so that you can put it all in there digitally and it can beep at you whenever you are supposed to be somewhere doing something?

What do you do so that you help yourself remember things that are important? If you are not sure, you can go to a bookstore and probably spend 20 minutes to a half hour probably just digging through all the books to help you get organized and keep track of your time. Then you have to wonder if that is the best use of your time.

Today our Lord gives us some advice on how to remember what is truly important. When he says to us, “*forget not all his benefits*”, he is also telling us how we are then to remember all of his benefits and all of his blessings. And the way he says to remember them is to live a life that continually praises the Lord. And as you go through Psalm 103, as you look down all of those verses, one after another they seem to pair together two things specifically that we are to praise the Lord for so that we don’t forget what he has done for us. We praise the Lord first of all for his forgiveness, and paired with that we praise the Lord continually for his unimaginable love—his love that goes beyond anything that we can really relate to. He gives us all kinds of illustrations in this Psalm. All kinds of pictures are painted in there over and over and over and even they are going to fail to completely convey to us how much our God loves us. You might do well to open up your Bible and just look through some of them in Psalm 103 as we go through them today.

He starts out, “*Praise the LORD, O my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. Praise the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits*”. That is how he begins the Psalm and that is how he ends the Psalm—a call to praise. Then in between when he talks about praising God, he doesn’t just say, “Alleluia, praise the Lord” over and over. He praises God by proclaiming what God has done. In verses 3 through 18, it just talks over and over about what God has done for us. This probably is a great reminder to you and me that the greatest praise that we can give our God is to tell others who he is and what he has done to take away their sins. That is the greatest praise we can offer. Our songs can sound wonderful and echo throughout our gathering place where we worship, but they aren’t going to compare to sitting a child on your knee and telling them that God lived and died in their place. Or sitting over a cup of coffee at a break at work

and telling that coworker who is troubled and fearful and worried and anxious how God has taken away your worries or helps you deal with them through the life and death of Jesus Christ. That is the greatest praise we can offer. Of course, that is the greatest blessing that God has given us.

He starts out telling what God has done by starting with what is really important—*“forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit”*. There is an interesting picture, right? It really tells us what we are by nature, doesn't it? He redeems my life from the pit, not the puddle, the pit. I am not just standing in some slush outside the last couple of days. I don't just have something that I have to brush off my shoes when I get home that made a little mess on my shoes. He redeems my life from the pit. Here is where you and I are by nature, right?—in a pit. A pit you can't climb out of, a pit that someone else can't throw you a rope or you can't make a rope on your own. You're in a pit that you can't get out of on your own. We are completely lost and condemned creatures. It doesn't sound fair, but it is reality. We are sinners. We deserve nothing from God. We can claim nothing from God. We are in the pit.

So what does our God do? He sends his Son to live and die in our place. He takes and throws us that rope that we could never fashion. He pulls us out of the pit. He doesn't just give us a makeover that covers over some blemishes on us. He completely changes us. He makes us a new creation when he forgives all our sins through believing that Jesus lived and died in our place. Hand in hand—God's forgiveness, God's unimaginable love, because not only does he pull us out of the pit, he *“crowns you with love and compassion”*. He doesn't just say that he has done something for us and now we are on our own. He continues to shower his love on us day after day by giving us what we need for life, by promising to be with us through life, by promising to strengthen and sustain us as we serve him—whether as a teacher in a school or a worker at a place of employment, or as a father, a mother, a spouse, a child—God promises to be with us and equip us to do what he has called us to do. He crowns our life with love and compassion.

Jump down to verse 6 and notice what it says there. *“The LORD works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed.”* The Lord works righteousness—this is what God demands of you and me—that we are righteous, that we are holy, that we are perfect, that we are right with God. You and I aren't. We know that. It is obvious. We were in that pit. Yet, notice who is doing everything here. God works righteousness. Our forgiveness is completely and totally dependent upon God and who he is and what he has done, not us. Again, this is unimaginable love. He has done it all.

Not only has he done it all, it says, *“He made known his ways to Moses, his deeds to the people of Israel”*. He shares with people from one generation to the next who he is and what he has done for us. He does that from parent to child. He does that by giving us called workers who are going to share the gospel with us and teach our children. He does this so that we might know that he is compassionate and loving.

It's interesting, isn't it, that's what he wants us to teach—his deeds, his love and his compassion. Do you ever find yourself using God's name around your children a little more often in a different way? Is the only thing your children know about God or that

they hear most often about God from your lips is that you really want him to send that hammer to hell, or that bill to hell, or whatever else it is that is troubling you and worrying you in your life right at that moment? You and I have such an incredible message to share with other people about God's love and forgiveness. We can make known not only what he has done for Moses but what he has done for us and what he has done for the people that we are talking to and so often we stop so far short of that noble goal, don't we?

We can talk about the weather ad nauseum, but to talk about Christ, that becomes more of a challenge for us, doesn't it? We fall short of what our God has called each of us to do in sharing the gospel with others. We can come up with excuses. We can say it's not that bad. We can say, "It's not like I killed someone." But when we have failed to do what God has called us to do, that is quite simply sin. But our God is "*compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love*", as verse 8 says.

What does that mean—slow to anger? All the times that you and I have changed the topic and talked about something else, all the times that we have had a chance to share Christ and we haven't—I wonder how many times that would be in your life and I wonder how many times that would be in my life. Think about that for a minute. It is probably an awfully big number. But God is slow to anger.

Think about yourself. If you are a parent and you have a small child and you are trying to do something really important like read the paper or watch the news on T.V., and that child keeps coming in and asking you something and keeps asking it over and over and over—how many times do they ask it before you start to get a little bit angry and raise your voice a little bit? Or maybe you are at work and you ask a coworker to do something and they say, "Sure" and then they go away and don't do it. You ask them again and they say, "Sure" and they go away and don't do it. You ask them again and they say, "Sure" and they go away and don't do it. You ask them again and they say, "Sure" and they go away and don't do it. How many times before you get a little bit angry at your coworker? If you are a wife, how many times does it take for your husband to say, "Uh huh" and not have clue of what you just said before you are angry with them?

Which number is bigger—those numbers you just thought of on how quickly we get angry or God, how patient God has been for all the times we have failed him? You and I are going to get pretty upset pretty quickly. But God in his heaven who knows every one of our thoughts—he knows the times we have failed him in our thoughts before it got to our words and our actions—he is slow to anger and abounding in love. He abounds in love and compassion. His heart goes out to us each and every time we fail him. In his love and his mercy, he has taken away every last time that you and I have failed him. The Holy Spirit who lives in our hearts leads us to recognize this and know this, and that gives us joy and confidence beyond imagining. When we truly are honest with ourselves and we see our sins and we see what we have done and we look at God and his love and his mercy and his willingness to forgive us in spite of who we are, that is what moves us to want to do better. That is why we want to live for God to thank him—not because we have to, but because we want to.

Sometimes doing that—living for God and wanting to live for God—is hard for us because we have that sinful nature and that sinful nature at times looks around and says, “Hey God. Where are you?” We are a little bit like Job in our first lesson, aren’t we? We see terrible things happen. We see natural disasters that come and devastate a city. We see a house fire and children die in the fire. We see cancer tear apart loved ones or even children. We see all this suffering and we see all these things around us and we think, “God, you said you are a God of love. How can you let those things happen? That just isn’t fair.”

That is when we need to remember all his benefits as our Psalm tells us so that we can continue to praise the Lord. It says quite clearly in verse 10 *“he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities.”* Yet God is not fair. God never will be fair as we think he should be fair, and that is why we are happy. If God is fair, you and I are going to hell. If God is fair, the scream “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me” would not come from Jesus’ lips. It would come through your throat and my throat. But God does not treat us as our sins deserve. Instead, he treated Christ as our sins deserve. He did not repay us according to all the times we have fallen short. He gave them all to Jesus Christ who took them to the cross. Jesus was perfect in our place. He doesn’t repay us as we deserve because he gives us the perfection that Jesus lived when the Spirit works faith in our hearts.

That is why the Psalmist can say quite clearly *“as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.”* Once again, why do you praise God? You proclaim that he has taken away our sins and he loves us higher than the heavens are above the earth. Love and forgiveness paired again together in verses 11 and 12.

Think of those pictures. As high as the heavens are above the earth—he is not talking about the sky. He is not talking about the stars. He is not talking about what the misguided Russian Cosmonaut said when he first came into outer space in the rocket. He said, “I can see up here and I don’t see any God. There is no God.” That is not the heavens that we are talking about. We are talking about heavens as the place of God. You can’t hop a space shuttle and get to the dwelling place of God. God dwells among his people through Word and Sacrament and God will live with his people perfectly after this world ends. But as high as that is, as far as that is beyond our reach, that is just how great and deep and long and wide the love God has for us is.

*“as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us”*—east and west will never meet. Isn’t that what we sang in our opening hymn? I don’t care how far east you go; you can always go farther, can’t you? You will never quite get to where you can say, “Now I am where the west is.” If you go west, you are never going to quite get to where the east is. East and west don’t meet. You can always keep going in one direction or the other. That is what God says he has done with our sins. The times we have failed them—he has removed them completely. He is not like you and me. We might say we have forgiven a spouse or a coworker or a child, but then when they screw up the same way the next time, do we remind them about it? Do we tell them about it? Does it jump out in the back of our minds? We don’t forgive as far as the east is from the west, but our God does. That is what gives us the

confidence to serve God wherever we serve him—that he has forgiven our sins and remembers them no more.

*“from everlasting to everlasting the LORD’s love is with those who fear him”*—that is important for us to remember because as God tells us, we are like grass—*“the wind blows over it and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more.”* We are troubled by that. We want to be remembered but we are told that no one is going to really remember us. We might remember some certain people. We might remember a Super Bowl MVP from a few years, but do you remember their third cousin? Probably not.

Our God remembers each and every one of us continually and perfectly and in his absolute love. He remembers us and shares his love with us and his righteousness with our children’s children. Those are the things that as Christians we need to go back to—whether we serve as a teacher in a classroom or anywhere else in our life. We need to go back to God’s forgiveness and his love. His forgiveness assures us that his love is still there for us and his love moves us to serve him with all that we have and with all that we are, because God has given us the gift of heaven. That is what we keep in front of us as we praise the Lord.