

God

Sermon for Trinity Sunday

Sermon Text: Romans 11:32-36



³² For God has consigned all to disobedience, that He may have mercy on all. ³³ Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and how inscrutable His ways! ³⁴ “For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been His counselor?” ³⁵ “Or who has given a gift to Him that He might be repaid?” ³⁶ For from Him and through Him and to Him

are all things. To Him be glory forever. Amen.

Who is it who actually determines how humans live? Who really decides who grows up in poverty and times of war while another has good things and wealth laid in their lap? A German saying goes like this: “You make your own luck.” This basically means that you can and should make the best out of your fate. And yet we know that we can’t lay out and plan our lives on a drawing board before us. Even when we would like to do that sometimes, our life is determined by very different things than our own plan and reason want it to be. Especially those who cling to such a good life must often experience bitter disappointment when everything good and right goes wrong. And even then, when you have built a beautiful and safe life, natural catastrophes and other things always happen that can destroy life overnight. Yes, who is it that decides these things? Who determines if I die horribly in a car accident or may live happy and content to an old age?

God invites us to trust Him. God invites us to trust Him – despite the many uncertainties in our lives. God invites us to trust Him – even when we can’t see His love very often. God invites us to believe that He is in our lives. To trust Him even when we can’t see His love and care. How does that even work- to trust and believe in this God whom we can’t see, feel, or taste? People have learned to use our senses and experiences and then draw our conclusions from such experiences. With believing in God, all these feelings and experiences are placed to the side for the moment. Paul simply states: God is invisible! God is unknown and He can’t be understood by people either. But when that’s true, then I have just lied when I said: God invites us to trust Him in our many uncertainties and fears. Because how can I trust someone and still also believe in Him when He is invisible, unknowable, and inscrutable? Or as the book of Ecclesiastes rationally states: He is in heaven, we are on earth. Paul simply points out this inscrutable and unknowable side of God and wants to tell us that we can’t determine anything at all about God. Not what God is like nor what He does with our lives. We can neither make God into a docile grandpa who constantly sweeps our mistakes under the rug, nor can we make Him into a dictator who pushes people around like marionettes as He pleases. Instead, we must simply concede and consent before His greatness. We can never see through Him and His plans.

But just because God is so vast and inscrutable to the mind doesn't mean that He doesn't love us. When it says that God is hidden, it's not that God has looked at the whole mess here on earth and then turned His back to the wall in disgust, saying: "I don't want to have anything to do with that mess anymore, for goodness' sake!" No, when God is hidden, then He is hidden only because we have hidden ourselves from Him and because we have distanced ourselves from Him, not because He distanced Himself from us. When Adam and Eve sinned, they distanced themselves from God of their own free will and hid themselves from God. Not the other way around! Since the first hour of the Fall, God did not stop asking about and calling out to His children: "Adam, where are you?" And yet, Adam remained in his hiding spot, and we, the children of men, remain in our hiding places. We can't and don't want to know the living God. That is the reason why we can't see God. And in the meantime, we have kept our distance from God for so long and so naturally that we not only do not want to recognize Him but also cannot recognize Him at all. And if we can't recognize God, then we can't recognize ourselves either! If I turn off the light during a completely dark night, then it is so dark around me that I can't even see my own hand in front of me, I can't even recognize myself! Not to mention not being able to see the other things in the room. And what is it like when someone is born blind? Then they don't even know how to imagine the world at all. It's actually like that for all of us! We are born blind to God. We can't even see ourselves as we truly are. And we definitely can't know God. Yet even when we can't see God, He can see us. Even if it seems like God is very far away from us, it is only like that to our eyes. And just because we can't understand God, doesn't mean that God can't understand us. We can't see through God. But He can see through us. He knows about our many insecurities. He knows about our doubt. He knows all of our deepest worries. But not so that He can sit high up in heaven and laugh about how dumb and unreasonable we are. Have we learned nothing after so many generations? No, this high and exalted God, who is so far away from us, reaches out to us in our need. He is also not indifferent to what happens to us in our lives and in our world. No, He makes His way to us.

What is this now? First, He is inscrutable, unknowable, and invisible...and now near to us? That is actually the reason why Paul is particularly astonished in the letter to the Romans – because the almighty, distant, and invisible God, makes Himself visible. We can be amazed at this. The Bible is a book full of astonished people who can now see this unknown God all at once, be it Adam and Eve in Paradise, Moses when he saw God in the burning bush, or the shepherds in the fields who encountered the angels announcing the birth of Jesus. Or whether it is the disciples who receive the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Constantly, we get to see how amazed people are that God makes the impossible possible. He breaks through the gates of darkness and ignorance! He breaks through the stubbornness of our hearts. He lives with us! In Jesus Christ, this living God ultimately is revealed and shows us not only His love but also breaks through the gates of hell, darkness, and death so that we can go back to God!

We could now say all is well and good. On the one hand, God the inscrutable, who now in Jesus Christ is completely in solidarity with people. We think of the many people who were on Jesus' path, the many people who spoke with Him, whose sins He forgave. Paul himself met Jesus on the way to Damascus. But is God on my path? Will He meet me too? Is He also near me? When I lose a loved one, does He know about my grieving? When I have to fight a difficult illness, is He also there with me? And when I must fight with one of my sins, is He also there? There are so many people who unfortunately remain stuck in darkness and sadness. They can only halfway accept that God is good and that He helps many but just not that God is also in my life here and now: God, yes; faith, yes; but not for me – I can't imagine God at all, He is not at all near to me and in any case, I haven't felt Him around me in a long time.

Dear Congregation, that's exactly why Paul is amazed in these verses, because God really went to all people. **For God has consigned all to disobedience, that He may have mercy on all. Oh, the depths of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!** In these verses, the amazement about God is justified precisely by the fact that it is possible for Him to not only be close to so-called religious professionals, but to everyone. Paul describes it like this: regardless of who they are, whether Jew or Greek, whether church people or heathens or atheists, they are all consigned to disobedience before God. This means that everyone has no right to God and no right to be mentioned in the same sentence with God – not even Paul, not even all the other saints. All these people have not stopped turning away from God. But then comes the amazing sentence. Nevertheless, God doesn't stop moving towards EVERYONE in His great love, He never stops forgiving them. In a busy, colorful world with many offers and needs, we live in all areas as if God were not there. And yet, in an astonishing one-sidedness, God still keeps on searching, asking, and knocking. Even before anyone considered the need to repent, God suffers in His separation. At the same time, He also searches for ways that He can get over this separation.

And before I even know what all of this means, my name is in the same sentence as God. Yes, and what's even more amazing, with the words: "I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," we are baptized into God. What a miracle that is! At this point, I could put behind me all my thoughts that lie between me and God. All these things that I blame myself for, consider myself unworthy of and don't want to appear before God, all of that doesn't matter anymore because God Himself broke through the barriers and comes to me. So, I can really become, be, and remain a child of God! Amen.