

Trinity 3 (2020)

When I was a boy in Sunday School our quarterlies – our little lesson books – had a very helpful feature.

At the back of each week's lesson was what was called a "Bible translator". Here, three or four words from that week's passage of scripture were highlighted and explained.

One word I seem to remember 'translated' was 'lovingkindness', and what a lovely word that is.

It is used extensively in the Old Testament and refers to a quality ascribed to God Himself. Here are a few examples of its usage:

"How excellent is thy **lovingkindness**, O God! therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings" (Psalm 36:7).

"Because thy **lovingkindness** is better than life, my lips shall praise thee" (Psalm 63:3).

"I will mention the **lovingkindnesses** of the Lord, and the praises of the Lord, according to all that the Lord hath bestowed on us. . . ." (Isaiah 63:7).

In all of these what is in view is God's steadfast love and covenant faithfulness.

Our devotion may waver. *We* may forget our promises and prove untrue, but not God.

Just as sure as the sun comes up every morning, we can be confident that His mercies never end.

More than that, these mercies are never based on how good *we* are, but how good *He* is.

That is what God's lovingkindness is all about.

Pause and reflect on your own situation. Consciously put that situation in the midst of God's lovingkindness.

Reach out to Him in full assurance that His arms are already outstretched to you.

And should you forget, two powerful symbols -- as I am going to show in this sermon -- stand ready to remind you of His faithfulness: the **rainbow** and the **cross**.

This first is mentioned in this morning's Old Testament lesson.

Here, we find God making His first explicit covenant with the human family.

Humans have misused the freewill God has given them. They have sought to put themselves in the place of God. That is the message of Genesis 3.

Now, six chapters over, this rebellion has spread out like tentacles of a cancer, and, as a result, the world is a mess.

If you or I were God . . . 'Bruce Almighty' in the movie . . . we might well at this point have hit the delete button and started all over again. But, God does nothing of the kind.

Well, let me backtrack, He *almost* seems to have done that with the flood . . . but that was not in fact His purpose.

Rather, His purpose was to reclaim His lost creation, beginning with His human creatures. To give them a fresh start.

When Noah and his family stepped out of the boat, they found themselves in a cleansed and renewed world, another Eden, if you pleased.

Moreover, they have God's own promise that He will never again destroy the world by water. The rainbow in the sky is God's signature certifying this promise.

Rainbows still attract our attention, don't they?

Down in Thomason Hall hangs a photo of one over this building. One of our neighbours took it.

Every time I see it, I think: **God shed His grace on thee, O St. Luke's!**

And that is what we should think every time we see a rainbow in the sky: **God shed His grace on thee, O human race!**

So, don't let this sign go to waste. Every time one appears, look up and say: **“Thank you, Lord, for your many loving-kindnesses.”**

But, the rainbow is not the only sign of God's love we have been given. Indeed, we have a greater, **the cross**.

Sadly, Genesis 9, the chapter from today's OT reading comes, does not end on a high note.

The conclusion is not, Noah and his family lived happily ever after, but **Noah got drunk and naked and something very unseemly happened between him and one of his sons.**

Does God's lovingkindness go away? Do rainbows come no more?

No, God's lovingkindness continues.

A day is coming when more than _____ man's environment will be cleaned up. On that day, the real root of the problem – the human heart – will be addressed.

The prophet Ezekiel saw that day coming and says in God's name:

“I will sprinkle clean water upon you

...

“I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh . . .

“I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes” (Ezekiel 36:25-27).

What Ezekiel saw from afar came with Jesus and required a cross. There on that tree God demonstrated His lovingkindness as no where else in all of history.

But what should be our response to such love?

Well, Peter in today's Epistle gives us some practical suggestions. Let me round off this sermon by highlighting three.

Our first response must be a **humility**: “Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God,” he writes.

Humility is hard, no doubt about it. Even, children, when daddy or mommy are attempting to help them with some task often resist and cry out “**I can do it myself!**” Have you ever heard a child say that?

Adults are no different. We want to do it ourselves, our way.

The problem is our way often gets us into trouble.

If we want to get life right, humility is required. A song that became popular in the 1970s shows us what that humility looks like:

*Put your hand in the hand of the man
Who stilled the water
Put your hand in the hand of the man
Who calmed the sea . . .
Put your hand in the hand of the man
From Galilee.*

These words still hold in these days of pandemic and societal unrest. Where is your hand this morning?

Our second response to God’s love as demonstrated on the cross must be **trust**. “Casting all you care on Him; for he careth for you,” writes Peter.

I wonder what cares you are lugging around this morning. Go ahead, make the move. Transfer them to Him, and see what peace follows. Only trust Him. Only trust Him.

Humility, trust, but there is yet another response we must make to God’s love. “Be vigilant,” writes Peter.

Why take on this defensive stance? /// Because there is a battle raging all round us . . . for our soul, but also at this moment for the soul of this country and indeed for the world.

Without a doubt, God is the chief warrior in this cosmic conflict, but we too have a part to play. Peter goes on to charge his readers to resist the devil steadfastly in the Lord.

What about you? Are you doing your part?

Never, go around saying, *someone* ought to do something. You are someone. What are you doing?

What is the impetus for holy resistance? For waging war on all that is unholy, dishonourable, untrue, unjust?

In a word: /// **God's lovingkindness.**

It works like this, and with this thought I close:

If God so loved us that He gave us *His* best, His Son . . .

In response, dare we give Him anything less than *our* best?

If we need encouragement, we have only to look to the rainbow and on to the cross.