

NEW MERCY EVERY MORNING
January 4, 2015 – Lamentations 3: 19-24 –New Year’s Communion
The Church of the Covenant

Some long time members will remember Dr. Bill Rusch and his family. I was friends with his son, Paul, when we were both in seminary and Paul provided me with perhaps one of the best illustrations of MERCY I ever recall. He was about to graduate from seminary. He owned an old beat up 1961 Plymouth Valiant that he had spray painted bright orange. It was in such bad shape that it had failed state inspection multiple times but he kept driving it. He was generous in loaning it out to other seminarians. So another friend, Steve McConnell, also son of a former pastor of this church, Dr. Mac, was driving the old orange Valiant to his field ed church when he heard a “flap-flap-flap” coming from the backseat and grabbed his sportcoat just before it was sucked out the giant, open hole in the floorboards in the backseat. You can now picture the state of this automobile. So Paul Rusch is about to graduate from seminary and he is driving around Princeton, a little too fast, as was his custom, and he got pulled over by the police. The police officer said to him: “Let’s see, you were exceeding the speed limit, ran through a stop sign, are driving a car that failed inspection two years ago (and Paul is feeling a little pessimistic as this litany of misdeeds is being stated) and, the officer continued, for that matter, you are driving with no shoes, recklessly, and don’t even have your driver’s license, your proof of insurance or your owner’s card with you. Right? Paul nods in affirmation. But I see that there is a seminary sticker in your back window. And I suspect you are a student and about to graduate. Paul nods. So the officer concludes: “So I’m just going to issue you a warning and the next time you’re in Princeton don’t do it again!” By definition *Mercy* is the unmerited favor of the Lord God Almighty. Paul –that’s MERCY.

Our scripture from the Old Testament book of Lamentations notes that “*The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end...*” (*Lamentations 3: 22*) The very nature of God is that He possesses never-ending mercies aplenty and in abundance. Then it goes on to say, “(*His mercies*) are new every morning.” (*v. 22*) The Lord God Almighty renews His mercies to us every morning and each and every day. And then it concludes: “*The Lord is my portion...therefore I will hope in Him.*” (*v. 24*) because this is who the Lord is and because the Lord possesses unlimited and unending mercies and because these infinite mercies are renewed each day...therefore, therefore, therefore, we may ALWAYS hope in Him. As we approach the New Year we know that the past is in the past and that it has been wiped clear by the mercy of God. We begin 2015 with the slate wiped clean. We begin 2015 without the regrets, sins and shortcomings of the 2014 and our past. We begin 2015 with the mercies of God which “are new every morning”. Wow! That’s MERCY.

I think as Presbyterians we make two errors where mercy is concerned. First, we believe somewhere in our heart that all the good stuff that we do sets up a “Mercy Account” for us up in heaven; we make deposits and then when we need mercy God has to give us mercy because of what we have done. Nope. God gives mercy to whom God gives mercy. The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh. Blessed be the name of the Lord. MERCY is *unmerited* favor. There are no merits, no good deeds, we bring to the table in order to force God to grant us mercy. And the second is in a way like the first, we somehow think that we have asked and prayed enough about something and the Lord gets tired of our prayers. Or we have gotten through this illness and that trial. We have been granted mercy in the past but somehow have used up our “Mercy Account” with God. So there’s no more mercy in the future. Nope. The mercies of God are infinite; they are renewed every morning; whatever we used up yesterday they are replaced by God ten-fold today. You can never exhaust the mercy of God. You can never deplete your account. You will never receive a mercy account overdrawn notice from the Lord God Almighty. His mercies are NEW every morning and they are new every morning because God never runs out of mercy...for you...

And its not because of what we've done. Its because of who HE is. And its not because of who we are. Its because of what HE has done, through His Son, Jesus Christ, on the cross, for us that there is MERCY for us, today and tomorrow and for eternity. MERCY poured out from the cross. Because of that His mercies are new every morning.

In ministry from time to time it feels as if as a pastor the gift of ministry might be taken away. You make some dumb decisions; you fail personally or in ministry; or your heart becomes hardened and angry and distant from God; you feel in the crosshairs; something happens that endangers your continuation as a pastor. The Bible says, *"We have this ministry by the mercies of God."* (2 Corinthians 4: 1) And what God gives today in mercy, God could take away by that same mercy tomorrow. It's a gift. It is mercy. Its not because I have framed diplomas on my office wall or went through seminary and the 64 steps to ordination in the Presbyterian Church that I am a minister. I am a minister by the mercies of God. And when something feels like it could be taken away it is then it becomes far more precious. It is why health becomes precious when we become sick. Or our faith becomes even more precious through our doubt. Or the times of profound favor and blessing from the Lord become even more precious in times when mercy feels the scarcest. How precious; how precious is the mercy of God's gift of ministry. It is why as I pray for you, for my family and for my church family, I thank God for the privilege it is to be your pastor, I pray for what you need, but more than that, I pray that you will receive mercy no matter what else happens in your life. Mercy, I plead. Grant them mercy, our merciful Father, from Thy mercy seat. That is who You are; that is why You have sent Jesus. Mercy. Have them see, Father, even in the hardest day, a glimpse of mercy in the midst of trials. Have them not be blinded by their pain or loss, by their temporary difficulty or the issue they face in this moment. Even death is surrounded by the mercy of eternal life. Father, surround them with your mercy; pour out Your unmerited favor on them because of what Jesus Christ has done for us, that we could never do for ourselves. Mercy. Mercy. Mercy. Your mercies, merciful Father, are new every morning and so I will not despair but always hope in You.

One of my favorite hymns is the one we will sing to conclude the service –“Great is Thy Faithfulness.” It is based upon our scripture from Lamentations. You know, how sometimes a Bible verse or a hymn gets you through a tough time in life? Well, this hymn has done that for me many a time. Indeed, the final line of it always gets me through to a place of mercy in my own life –“Great is thy faithfulness. Great is thy faithfulness. Morning by morning new mercies I see. All I have needed thy hand hath provided. Great is thy faithfulness, Lord unto me.” And perhaps you may note that as I am singing it I hold open my hands, expecting mercy to be poured down and into me by the Lord, and then over the years I unwittingly added, pointing my index finger into the palms of my hands. And one day I realized that this was the sign language sign for Jesus –to point to the nail scarred hands of Jesus from the cross is the sign of Jesus in sign language. Mercy pours down from God because of what Jesus Christ has done for us at the cross. Mercy is infinite because of Calvary. Mercy is new each day because we are new creations in Christ. So as I pray for you I open up my hands to God, praying for mercy, expecting mercy to come from the mercy seat of a merciful God, through the mercy we receive at the cross from Jesus. Communion is coming into the presence of mercy in the person of Jesus Christ and being filled, having our mercy account refilled to overflow with all the mercy of God shed for us at Calvary. For this fact alone I love communion. God never runs out of mercy, and because of Jesus, neither will we. “All I have needed thy hand hath provided. Great is thy faithfulness, Lord unto me.” And Amen.

*By: The Reverend Dr. Stuart D. Broberg, The Church of the Covenant, Washington, PA
IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!*