

Divine Show and Tell

Listening to King David speak about God in our Old Testament lesson, we hear a lot of things that make *perfect sense* to our ears of faith. “*With the merciful You show Yourself merciful; with the blameless man You show Yourself blameless; with the purified You deal purely.*” God shows us all these things about Himself, and it all makes sense. That’s just who He is—merciful, blameless, and pure.

And through faith, we understand these divine realities in multiple ways, *none of which are wrong*. A careful reading of this text shows us that *with* the merciful God shows Himself to be merciful. It doesn’t say *to* the merciful, but *with* the merciful.... Does God show His mercy and love *through* us to all those around us? Yes! His Light—the Light of Christ—shines through us. We are not the light of the world. Jesus is. His Light gives light to all those in the darkness of sin and death. His Light shines upon us; it shines in us; it is to shine *through* us (like a lantern) for all the world to see. In this way, we can rightly understand that it is with those who are merciful that God Himself is showing His mercy. By means of our showing mercy to others, God Himself is showing His mercy. The same goes for showing forth His blamelessness and His purity. It is with/through those who have been made blameless (without stain or blemish) and pure in Christ that God shows forth His blamelessness and purity. He shows forth Christ.

The same could even be said of the actions/behaviors of the crooked and sinful, although we do need to note that there is a shift in the language here. God doesn’t show Himself to be tortuous (which is a fancy way of saying “crooked, unfair, or unjust” not “torturous,” although there are times that God can seem torturous too). Rather, He only *seems* to be tortuous. By means of crooked and wicked people God can seem to be rather crooked and unjust, can’t He? This is certainly true of “everyday real life.” Life gets tough; bad things happen; we feel the crushing weight of the crosses we’re bearing, and one of the first things we do is blame God. “*Why, God?! What have I done to deserve this?! How could you do this to me?!*” In those moments of sorrow and grief and despair, God does seem to be tortuous, maybe even uncaring, absent, or indifferent; perhaps even a bit torturous. “*What kind of God would permit this kind of evil?!*” ***As I said, though: This all makes sense to our ears of faith, doesn’t it?***

But here’s the thing: We can’t forget the fact that God also shows His mercy *to* those who are merciful. It’s not just with/by the merciful that God shows His mercy, but it is also *to* the merciful that God shows Himself merciful. ***To*** the blameless He shows Himself blameless. ***To*** the pure He deals purely, and ***to*** the crooked He makes Himself seem tortuous. There’s nothing karmic or works-righteous about any of this either, as if we have to first be merciful ***before*** God will

show us mercy. No! What this means, simply put, is that God doesn't play games. He doesn't deal in *lip service*. He doesn't deal in hypocrisy and only putting on a *good outward show*, while the inward reality is something much different.

You know as well as I do that people can and do boast all day long about being "merciful." They put on a great outward show of their "mercy." They make sure to let everyone know how kind and generous and merciful they are. And yet...when it comes to actually showing mercy, they fall flat. ***They show the REAL truth about themselves.*** They show who they really are. If you show mercy only for a tax deduction or to only get praise from people; if you show mercy to your friend, but not to the person you don't like, ***are you truly merciful? If no one sings your praises, do you stop showing mercy? If so, is it really mercy that you're concerned about? What does such "mercy" show about you—the REAL you?***

God knows the heart. He knows the Truth. Why are faithful children of God merciful to others? Answer: Because of God's mercy first shown to them. We love because He first loved us. God **NEVER** rewards or praises hypocrisy, but to those who hold fast to His mercy He deals mercifully. To those who hold fast to His justifying declaration of blamelessness; His washing away of the stain of sin, and His covering over in Christ's perfect righteousness, which enables us to stand blemish-free and blameless in His eyes; to those faithful ones He shows His ***spotless, blemish-free love***; love that was made flesh and hung on a cross to die for us. To those who cling to His purity; the purifying righteousness He washes us with in Holy Baptism; the purifying, life-giving righteousness He Himself nourishes us with in His body, His blood, and His holy Word; to those who have been made pure ***by and through*** His means of grace, He deals with them in purity.

But...to those who are crooked and sinful, God shows Himself to be ***pawthal (Hebrew), which can translated as "tortuous, crooked, unfair, unjust," but can also be understood as "shrewd," that is, "clever and astute."*** Yes, you heard me right. I said "shrewd." I didn't say "tortuous." The original Hebrew is difficult here, not just in terms of translation, but more so in terms of theological understanding. The original Hebrew doesn't say that God only *seems* shrewd. It can be understood that way, but that's not the **ONLY** way of understanding it. Rather, the text states very plainly that ***God shows Himself to be shrewd*** to those who are crooked/sinful.

Shrewd: That's the same language Jesus uses in our parable, but such shrewdness is praised there, isn't it? *This is important to understand. The dishonesty and thievery of the dishonest manager in the Gospel lesson isn't being praised, but his shrewdness; that is, his ***cleverness and astuteness***. His shrewdness

is praised because he shows forth the master's mercy. He knows the master is *merciful and just*, and he knows that the master won't renege on the tortuous, crooked, and unfair deals that were made in his name. The deals will stand. This guy, shrewdly banking on the mercy of the master, winds up looking like a hero in the customers' eyes, and it is by showing forth the master's mercy that he shrewdly secures for himself a nice little future.

I want you to think about all this. I know it's easy to recognize the proverbial merciful master as our God and Lord, but, as weird as this may seem, we can also see a connection between the servant's praiseworthy shrewdness and God's shrewdness. *The shrewdness and cleverness and astute wisdom of God is certainly something to be praised, is it not?* God works all things for the good of those who love Him, right? Look no further than right here [the cross]. Who would EVER think that this is good/victory?! Yes, God absolutely seems to be crooked and unfair and unjust (not to mention torturous) in this wretched display, doesn't He? Here is His wrath against sin, battered, bloodied, and nailed on a cross for all the world to see. Here is how God views and handles our sin! He puts His own innocent Son to death because of it. An innocent man paid the ultimate price for our sins! Holy and sinless God died for our wretched sins! That's about as crooked and unfair as you can get!

And make no mistake: This is **exactly** what the devil wanted all along—the death of God—never realizing that this is *exactly* what God wanted and man needed for salvation. It was only after it was too late that the devil finally caught on to the whole tortuous plan. “*Save yourself. Prove that you're God and come down off that cross!*” It didn't work. That demonic fool was too late. ***Talk about divine shrewdness and wisdom!*** God used the devil and his minions to bring about their own defeat. Thinking they were winning, He let them destroy themselves by laying down His life for each and every sin of the entire crooked world, mine and yours included. By means of this all-atoning death, God Himself showed and proved that mankind's debt of sin was paid for in full. “*It is finished, once and for all!*” Nothing and no one was left out. This cruciform shrewdness is certainly worthy of all praise and thanksgiving!

And that's how we want to end today: Pointing to Christ and the merciful, gracious loving shrewdness of our God and Lord. It is here on this bloody cross and in these humble, simple means of grace that God Himself shows us and gives to us the gift that is Himself. Here is God, your rock, your refuge, your light, your life. “*Who is God, but the Lord?*” Answer: No one! And it is this triune God and Lord who **will** receive you into the eternal dwelling He (“they”—ref. the plural in Luke 16:9) has already prepared for you when He declares your earthly service over and calls you home to heaven to give an account of all that He has so mercifully and graciously entrusted to you. And I know that this “end-of-

life accounting” terrifies some of you. ***It shouldn’t.*** My dear faithful, baptized children of God: Have no fear of this accounting, for the one who is grounded in Christ’s mercy and grace, and covered over in His blamelessness and purity will stand proudly before their Lord and Master ***and point to Christ*** when asked to give an account. Their sins were put to death in Him. His righteousness is imputed to them. By faith we hold fast to this blessed Law/Gospel Truth. May this ever and always be your reality. Hold fast to His mercy, His blamelessness, and His purity, ***and be at peace***, for He is yours and You are His, now and into all eternity.

AMEN