

“Now I Know In Part...”

Sermon Text – 1 Corinthians 13:12

Epiphany 4, C (LSB Propers)

Sunday & Wednesday, January 31 & February 3, 2010

Zion Lutheran Church, Beecher, IL

Old Testament Reading – Jeremiah 1:4-10

Epistle Reading – 1 Corinthians 12:31b-13:13

Gospel Reading – Luke 4:31-44

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our blessed Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text is one selected verse from today’s epistle from 1st Corinthians. St. Paul writes, **“For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; *then* I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.”** (v. 12, ESV)

Dear friends in Christ Jesus,

One question that pastors are asked most frequently is that little three letter word, **“Why?”** At a hospital bedside or in the family waiting room, **“Why?”**

Why this illness... why the accident... why me... why my loved one... why now?

When things are going badly within a marriage or family... when difficulties with work or finances loom on the horizon... **“Why?”** Why these problems, why us, why now, why don’t things work out the way we hoped and planned? And especially... when a loved one dies... **“Why?”** Why this pain? Why this loss? Why this death?

All I can answer is... **“I don’t have an answer. I don’t know the reason as to why God allowed this or that to come upon you!”** As St. Paul says in our text, **“Now I know in part...”**

I only know that all these things somehow fit into God’s plan, but God hasn’t fully revealed His plan to me... *nor to anyone...* for that matter!

Although I don’t know the reason *why* such things happen... I *do* know what is *not* the reason why. I’m certain... and you can be certain as well... that when such things happen to those who trust in Christ as their Savior... it’s *never* a punishment from God. As Psalm 103 says, **“[God] does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities.”** (v. 10, ESV)

How can we be certain that the troubles and trials in our lives are not *ever* a punishment from God? Because God’s Son, Jesus Christ, fully suffered for our sins and paid for all our guilt on the cross. As the Book of Isaiah says, **“Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. ⁵But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed.**

⁶All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.” (Isaiah 53:4-6, ESV)

Because of Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross in your place... God forgives you all your sins. *That* is the central message of the Christian faith: God *isn’t* angry with you. I’ll say it again: God *isn’t* angry with you... even in spite of your sins. St. Paul repeats this in Romans: **“We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”** (Rom. 5:1, ESV)

On account of Christ’s life, death, and resurrection, God loves you, God forgives you, God promises you nothing less than eternal life in the name and on account of His Son, Jesus Christ. Paul told the man in jail... and he tells us: **“Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved...”** (Acts 16:31, ESV)

But the question with which we began still looms before us: **“Why?”**

If God *isn’t* angry with me... if God *isn’t* punishing me... if God forgives me and loves me... then why do these things happen to me?

We don’t know why... *but God does*. The writer of Psalm 139 speaks to God and states the truth: **“[O God] All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.”** (Psalm 139:16, NIV)

All these things are part of God’s plan for you. In *this* life, his plan is beyond our comprehension, our understanding. God tells us this much through the pen of Isaiah: **“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. ⁹For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.** (Isaiah 55:8-9, ESV)

And He further tells us in Psalm 40: **“Many, O Lord my God, are the wonders you have done. The things you planned for us no one can recount to you; were I to speak and tell of them, they would be too many to declare.”** (Psalm 40:5, NIV)

And... finally... as St. Paul wrote earlier in 1st Corinthians: **“...no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him...”** (1 Cor. 2:9, ESV)

In this life, God hasn’t fully revealed his plan to us because in this life... his plan is simply beyond our comprehension... it’s beyond our weak human understanding.

But in the life to come... that is, in heaven... we’ll have a perfect knowledge and a complete understanding of God’s plan for our lives. That’s what St. Paul is saying in our text: **“For *now* we see in a mirror dimly, but *then* face to face. Now I know in part; *then* I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.”** (v. 12, ESV)

We take high-quality glass mirrors for granted. But in ancient times, mirrors were usually made *not* of glass but of polished bronze. It’s hard for us to keep in mind that most people in ancient times really didn’t have any idea what they

themselves looked like... for mirrors were a luxury... and even the best mirrors gave a poor, distorted reflection.

St. Paul tells us today, that in *this* life, that's all we can see of God's plan. From God's word we have *some* idea what his plan is... but usually what we do have... is only a fuzzy picture... leaving us unable to see how it all fits together. **"Now we see in a mirror dimly..."**

But, in the life to come... in heaven... God will grant us a perfect understanding of his plan for us, because then we shall see Him **"face to face."**

Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known." Just as the Lord now fully knows us... even to the point of numbering the very hairs on our heads... in heaven we shall fully know... *and fully understand* His plan for our lives. The fuzziness... the lack of clarity... will have *finally, fully, and eternally* disappeared!

There's one more point to which I must draw your attention. In the Book of Romans, God reveals a truth from which we, His people, take much comfort: **"And we know that in all things, God works for the good of those who love Him..."** (Rom. 8:28, NIV)

Dear Christians, When you're sitting on the edge of your bed with tears forming in your eyes... wondering "Why?..."

When you're contemplating a myriad of problems that seem to have no solution and again, you wonder "Why...?"

When your mind is numb to everything around you except the heartache that threatens to envelop you... remember this...

Know for certain, that you are in the Lord's hands, and there is no better place to be. Know for certain, that He *is* working all things together... *not* for your punishment... *but for your good!*

"For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known." Thanks be to God! [Amen.]

The peace of God that passes all human understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. [Amen.]