

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

[How can we describe of God?]

Brothers and sisters in Christ,

We have a problem.

(Well, actually, we have a whole lot of problems—at least I do.)

But I’m thinking of one problem in particular:

How can we describe the infinite God in finite human words?

If the universe cannot contain him,

how can mere human words contain or confess who he is?

Let me give you an example.

We say God is a “Holy Trinity,” but we can’t really explain what that means.

God is one, but also three. But the Son isn’t the Father, nor the Spirit, and vice-versa,

Yet all three are God. But not parts of God; they’re totally God.

We say God is three-in-one, and can’t comprehend it.

It is a mystery!

God doesn’t fit in a box.

And when we try to fit him into one,
confident we’ve got Him figured out now,
ready to drive that last nail into place,

He taps us on the shoulder and asks what we’re building.

So how can we describe God?

The Small Catechism helps. The Explanation for the First Article of the Creed:

“He defends me against all danger and guards and protects me from all evil.

*All this He does out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy,
without any merit or worthiness in me.*

For all this it is my duty to thank and praise, serve and obey Him.”

We can speak of God, in terms of what He *does*.

He shows “fatherly, divine goodness and mercy.”

He does this in the Person of Jesus Christ.

JESUS SHOWS US THE FATHER’S HEART.

[Loves makes us his children.]

In every language there are some words that are so rich in meaning that they're impossible to really translate.

In Hebrew, one of those words is *chesed*. (You're actually quite familiar with it!)

"Oh give thanks unto the LORD for he is good; his chesed endures forever."

Chesed. That word can be rendered any number of ways:

"steadfast love,"

"loving kindness,"

"mercy,"

"faithfulness,"

"goodness."

Chesed is hard to translate,

but it points us to the very nature of our God, who *is* love. (1 Jn 4:8)

The psalmist in our text today wrote:

*"For as high as the heavens are above the earth,
so great is his chesed toward those who fear him."* (Psalm 103:11)

The height and breadth of the *chesed* of God is so boundless that it reaches from heaven to earth. And, oh, how we need the Father's *chesed*!

Our sin is so deep and so profound that we can never reach to heaven.

We see the evidence every day:

We hear of wars and rumors of war – unrest in our nation.

We watch our neighbors tear each other down.

We see life given by God treated as an inconvenience – at every stage.

But "Ah!" we might say,

"I'm not starting wars. I'm not tearing down my neighbors. I'm caring for life."

Yet have we looked into our hearts?

Can any of us say that we have never, in our hearts,
hated, lusted, or broken any part of God's Law?

Never gotten a little envious of the gifts under someone else's tree, so to speak?

Maybe we would've appreciated it better?

Used it to greater good?

Perhaps we even truly *needed* it more?

The wicked desires of our hearts are the reasons for wars,
rumors of wars,
social unrest,
and contempt for life.

We must all confess that God's mercy comes "without any merit or worthiness in us."

And that is how it comes!

Despite our failings, our heavenly Father reaches down and claims us.

His *chesed* extends from him to the depths of humanity—to us.

[Love binds him to us, and us to him.]

So great is the Father's *chesed*,
his "steadfast love,"
his "loving kindness,"
his "mercy,"
his "faithfulness,"
his "goodness,"
that he sent us his Son, at a cost that we cannot fathom.

JESUS SHOWS US THE FATHER'S HEART.

The Father has such *chesed* for a world lost in sin,
that he joined God the Creator to man the creature.

His only begotten Son was born as the Child of Mary and the Brother of all humanity.
He bore the sin of the world as the holy Lamb of God, the once-and-for-all Sacrifice.
He came so that the beautiful words of Psalm 103 would speak the greatest truth:

*"as far as the east is from the west,
so far does he remove our transgressions from us."* (Psalm 12)

All of our transgressions—our failure to return *chesed* to God and share with others—
would be placed as far from us, as the sunrise is from the sunset.

See the *chesed* of God in his Son!

See him preaching the Gospel to those who live in darkness.

See him loving and calling to himself those who live on the outer rims of society—
lepers, Samaritans, tax collectors, adulterous women and so many others.

See him giving a meal to his disciples on the night in which he was *betrayed*,
his blessed body and blood given for his Church of all ages.

See him on a cross with *thieves* crucified on either side,

and listen to him say to the repentant thief, "Today you will be with me in paradise."

See him placed in the tomb of death,

and rising again in love to destroy death.

See him commission his disciples to go to all the world to baptize all nations
in his name, and in the name of his Father, and the Holy Spirit
and to teach them all that he has commanded.

Jesus is divine *chesed* in human flesh.

He is the manifestation of the Father's great mercy bestowed on his wayward children.

Jesus brings the *chesed* of God right into your life here and now.

You live as a baptized child of God,

nurtured with his Sacrament

and blessed with his Absolution,

"Your sin is forgiven. It is removed from you as far as the east is from the west."

JESUS SHOWS US THE FATHER'S HEART.

*For as high as the heavens are above the earth,
so great is his [chesed] toward those who fear him;
as far as the east is from the west,
so far does he remove our transgressions from us.
As a father shows compassion to his children,
so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him.* (Psalm 103:11–13)

For weeks this Advent we've prayed, "Come, Lord Jesus."
Now very soon we'll celebrate the great miracle of Bethlehem,
where the *chesed* of God took on human flesh
and first revealed His sacred face.

Already today, he comes to you and me, this very moment, in His Word.
And the day is coming when he'll return,
And we'll see Him face-to-face—
and we won't have any problem trying to describe Him.
Come, Lord Jesus! Amen.

**Declare his glory among the nations,
his marvelous deeds among the people. Amen! (Psalm 96:3)**
