

Our Father in heaven, You are a Father indeed, merciful, good, and kind. Teach us to know and to acknowledge You as the Giver of every good gift. Do not deal with us after our ingratitude and apathy, but chasten us with measure, so as to keep us in the way everlasting. Amen. (Reading the Psalms with Luther, Ps. 78, CPH, p.188)

And all spoke well of [Jesus] and marveled at the gracious words that were coming from His mouth. And they said, "Is not this Joseph's son?" And He said to them, "Doubtless you will quote to Me this proverb, 'Physician, heal Yourself.' What we have heard You did at Capernaum, do here in Your hometown as well." And He said, "Truly, I say to you, no prophet is acceptable in his hometown. But in truth, I tell you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heavens were shut up three years and six months, and a great famine came over all the land, and Elijah was sent to none of them but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian." When they heard these things, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath. And they rose up and drove Him out of the town and brought Him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they could throw Him down the cliff. But passing through their midst, He went away.

In Christ Jesus, the Gift of all gifts from the hand of our generous and gracious Father in heaven, dear fellow redeemed:

We use the word "favor" differently today than what its root meaning has in Scripture, Old and New Testament alike. When we use "favor" today, it is an act or attitude engendered by the likeability of the person it is done for or shown to. But when God speaks of His favor directed toward someone it is an unearned disposition of unconditional love, which is the basis for an act, gift or attitude from Him. We find that use in the greeting of Gabriel to the Virgin Mary: "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you." Mary was chosen purely by God's grace, not based on her deserving.

However, it is a common misunderstanding that God chooses people in Scripture based on their unique deserving and thus He plays favorites. But Scripture is clear that there is no partiality with God. His choosing of people is purely by His undeserved love. In our text, Jesus is in His hometown of Nazareth. His fellow townspeople assumed He would favor them, because of their shared place of origin. But Jesus points out episodes from Israel's history revealing the Lord's impartiality. So on this day when we consider God's

gracious providence at work among us, let us take note that **God's Grace Extends Daily to Everyone.**

I

It is common for us to think we automatically are going to be shown favoritism when we are dealing with someone who is from our same home country, state, or town. We also look for other contact points that may cause another to show partiality. It could be shared area of politics, sports teams, hobbies, experiences, religions, etc. At first it may simply be a conversation starter but it does not take long and we consider how it may affect us when we need to call for a favor. That person with whom you have built up some favoritism may have a skill set that you do not and may need to come to your rescue. Perhaps the other person is a lawyer, a plumber, a mechanic, a nurse, etc. At some point you may call upon that person you think is partial to you and you ask for a favor in his/her area of expertise.

At first Jesus found His hometown residents receptive. We read: "all spoke well of [Jesus] and marveled at the gracious words that were coming from His mouth." They went on to identify Him as the son of Joseph, which in a sense minimized His person. So Jesus anticipating the progression of their thought said: "Doubtless you will quote to Me this proverb, 'Physician, heal Yourself.' What we have heard You did at Capernaum, do here in Your hometown as well." They were demanding proof before they would go any further in their identification of Jesus as the Christ.

Jesus was not about to show any favoritism and quoted the proverb: "Truly, I say to you, no prophet is acceptable in his hometown." So instead of his hometown embracing Jesus with their favor, they put Him under greater scrutiny. Jesus was not going to comply, but rather pointed out their gross misunderstanding of how God works among us sinners.

II

The Lord God, our Creator, loves the entire human race and has a heart full of grace for all people. So in His providence, He provides what we need for our bodies and life without partiality. This is what we confess in Luther's explanation of the First Article of the Apostles' Creed: *He richly and daily provides me with food ... and all that I need to support this body and life ... all this purely out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me. And in the explanation of the Fourth Petition in the Lord's Prayer: God certainly gives daily bread without our prayer, **even to all the wicked**; but we pray in this petition that He would lead us to acknowledge this and to*

receive our daily bread with thanksgiving. Daily bread includes everything needed for this life, such as food, ... health, ... and the like.

But in their spiritual arrogance over against others, especially this hometown son, these ingrates from Nazareth did not view these as gifts from God's love. Instead they were viewed as things they deserved based on their ancestry, even earned by their good behavior.

So Jesus points out how God through His prophets came to the rescue in His gracious providence for a Gentile widow and general. Jesus pointed out that there were many widows in need of help in Israel in Elijah's day, but God chose to provide help to this foreign widow in Zarepheth. Similarly there were many lepers in Israel in Elisha's day who needed healing, but God chose to provide help to this foreign Syrian commander-in-chief.

Neither the widow nor the great general were humble grateful recipients of God's gracious providence. Both of them resisted the Lord's prophet who was dealing with them at first. So they not only were of Gentile ancestry, they did not present themselves as true worshippers of the One true God. When Jesus mentions this to His hometown crowd we read: "all in the synagogue were filled with wrath. And they rose up and drove Him out of the town and brought Him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they could throw Him down the cliff." Knowing these accounts well, they were offended by God's love for the Gentile widow and general.

Have you looked at others who you consider to be more blessed in this life and resent it, thinking that you somehow deserve God's favor more than they? Sadly, we have all fallen for such temptations. Perhaps you are still harboring such thoughts over against others - declaring God to be unfair by not favoring you!

Jeremiah the prophet of the Lord asks this question: "Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why do all who are treacherous thrive?" It is not strange for believers to think like this. Although the ways of God's providence are often hidden from us, by His grace in Christ we learn to trust His ways are always the kindest and the best.

We see our gracious Lord controlling all things for our benefit at the end of our text. Even though His hometown detractors wanted to kill Him, we read: "passing through their midst, He went away." It was not His time to die, nor was this the way. But when it was, He would die willingly for our salvation upon the cross. This is the clearest demonstration of His great love for everyone, His believers and unbelievers alike. The love God has for the entire human race is always grounded and rooted in His love for His Son our Savior.

This grace of God, His undeserved love, is offered to everyone every day. Never accept the expression that someone is going through a living hell. Not even the unbeliever is experiencing hell in this life. This is his or her time of grace when God even provides all that is needed for this body and life and calls everyone to believe in His Son for forgiveness, life and salvation.

You have been called by our Lord and chosen as His dear child, not because of your ancestry nor based on your life of good behavior. Despite your ancestry as a sinner and your life filled with countless sins, even the bigoted sins of arrogance and hatred of others, you are forgiven and stand in Christ's perfect life of impartiality. Rejoice that God's abundant grace in all good gifts is extended to you every day and extended to all your neighbors alike. Provided all that you need for your body and life and for life eternal, Jesus, as He did for the 4,000 in the Gospel lesson, sends you out in this life among your neighbors every day rejoicing in such gracious providence for all. Amen.