

September 24, 2016  
Rev. Diane Monti-Catania

## **Sermon - "My God, in Whom I Trust"**

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In *A Cry for Mercy* Henri Nouwen wrote:

"O Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, have mercy on me, a sinner... It seems as if I am standing on one side of a huge canyon and see how I should grow toward you, live in your presence and serve you, but cannot reach the other side of the canyon where you are. I can speak and write, preach and argue about the beauty and goodness of the life I see on the other side, but how, O Lord, can I get there?"

In today's passage from Luke we see another picture of a great abyss – the one between heaven and hell.

The unnamed rich man finds himself in a tormented state and calls out to Abraham to allow the poor man, Lazarus to help him.

The arrogance of this man is appalling.

He cannot shed his sense of entitlement, even in the midst of hell.

I find it intriguing to imagine the souls in hell able to see the souls in heaven – what greater punishment could there be?

I realize that many people do not believe in the heaven/hell dichotomy as an explanation for afterlife, however, the point of the gospel is that how we live this life matters.

The question that emerges for us this day is how we bridge Nouwen's canyon or the rich man's abyss in our lives.

How do we get to the place where God reigns from where we are now?

The psalmist answers our plea.

We get there by trusting in God's steadfast love.

We get there by embracing the idea that God's love protects us, upholds us and is eternal.

So much of our discontent in this life is a result of our own lack of trust in God; our need to control things.

We succumb to our fears – fear of violence, fear of poverty, fear of abandonment.

We curl up in the corner.

Why are we so afraid?

God has promised:

*You who live in the shelter of the Most High, who abide in the shadow of the Almighty...*

*Those who love me, I will deliver; I will protect those who know my name. When they call to me, I will answer them.*

This particular psalm was a turning point in my own journey of faith many years ago.

I was particularly drawn to the words “You will not fear the terror of the night, or the arrow that flies by day.”

For me, at that time, I was literally afraid of the night – of walking out of a meeting after dark, of sleeping in the house alone.

The arrows that flew by day were the judgment of others, the criticism of colleagues, the insecurity of being less than perfect.

And then I read or heard this psalm.

I decided to believe it.

I would recite it when I was afraid until one day I realized that I wasn't afraid any more.

This beautiful hymn had found its way into my heart and transformed me from a fearful person to a trusting person.

God had stepped in and placed me in the palm of his hand and I was safe.

I remain there to this day and am humbled by the grace bestowed upon me.

This grace is offered to you.

Frederick Buechner says: “The grace of God means something like: Here is your life. You might never have been, but you are, because the party wouldn't have been complete without you. Here is the world. Beautiful and terrible things will happen. Don't be afraid. I am with you. Nothing can ever separate us. It's for you I created the universe. I love you.”

Why is it difficult for us to allow ourselves to be loved?

Why do we struggle when we are the intended recipients of a gift?

Jesus concludes his parable today with these words: “If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.”

Was he being prophetic?

Was Jesus foretelling a time when people wouldn't listen to him – the one who arose from the dead?

Is he talking about us?

We are the recipients of God's grace and love.

Our only responsibility in this life is to share that grace and love with others.

Cornell West tells us that "Justice is what love looks like in public and tenderness is what love looks like in private."

That doesn't seem so hard.

Nouwen concludes his lament with words of instruction that we might follow:

"I can only keep trying to be faithful, even though I feel faithless most of the time. What else can I do but keep praying to you, even when I feel dark; to keep writing about you, even when I feel numb; to keep speaking in your name, even when I feel alone. Come, Lord Jesus, come. Have mercy on me."

My friends, I wish I could simply release you from your fears by saying so.

I wish I could guide you to the shadow of the Almighty and let you rest there.

I want you to feel safe.

I want you to feel loved.

I pray that God's holy spirit will find its way into your heart and transform you;

release you from your fears and embrace you with a love that overwhelms you.

Until that happens, I encourage you to live as if it might.

Live each day with the expectation that today might be the day that grace finds me.

Wake up each morning looking forward to the many ways God manifests his presence to you throughout the day.

Go to sleep each night comforted by knowing that you are protected, you are safe, you are loved.

Amen.