



Hebrews 12:18-29; Psalm 103:1-8; Luke 13:10-17

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For those of us who have experienced the grace and mercy of God; for those of us who have known God's compassion, forgiveness and rehabilitation; for those of us who have felt God's presence and companionship, in good and bad times, and have trusted God's loyalty even when God felt distant and absent, and we didn't know how to face the present and even less the future, a longing remains: Will our children have faith? Will they enjoy the same trusting relationship with the Lord? Indeed, will they know the Lord? Will they know and acknowledge God's goodness toward them? When we look at the world that God so loves burning, won't we pray that our children will enjoy the protection of the Lord and claim God as their shelter and sure fortress, a good Father (and Mother) to all? Will anyone else in the world be left out of our prayer? Will our world be limited to our kin?

Faith can't be reduced to individual piety. The presence of our loved ones alone compels us to expand our boundaries and actually to eliminate boundaries altogether. Our faith cannot simply be reduced to a me and God affair, and it is neither enough nor healthy to limit our faith life to individualistic moments of prayer requests.

We insist on self-justification: "I am a good person!" as to convince ourselves and others, and to solicit sympathy and confirmation by saying it aloud. Would we pass the test of the Commandments? It's not only what we have done but also what we have failed to do that convicts us.

"God knows my heart," we proclaim with the false humility that only hides our fear and arrogant self-deception.

Indeed, God knows our heart. I do not need to pretend or hide before God. God knows us intimately and is aware that we are a work in progress. If we truly knew our heart, we would be beating our breast non-stop raising our hands to heaven and acknowledging: "Mea culpa!"

Psalm 103 outlines in detail just what God does for our soul: **God forgives** iniquity, **heals** diseases, **redeems** from the Pit (a reference to death), **crowns** with steadfast love and mercy, **satisfies** us with what we need, and **works vindication and justice** for all who are oppressed (vv. 3–6).

Psalm 103 is incredibly poetic in expressing theological insights: “**The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.**” (v. 8)

The word translated “**merciful**” in Psalm 103:4, 8 is derived from the Hebrew verbal root *raham*, whose noun form *rehem* means “**womb**.” God’s compassion is tied closely to the concept of “womb love,” the love a mother feels for her yet-to-be-born child, a “womb love” that continues even as the child grows into adulthood. The Psalmists remember God’s mercy, or womb love, extensively:

- Ps 25:6 - Be mindful of your mercy, O LORD, and of your steadfast love.
- Ps 69:16 - Answer me, O LORD, for your steadfast love is good; according to your abundant mercy, turn to me.
- Ps 145:9 - The LORD is good to all, and his compassion [another word used by the New Revised Standard Version to translate *mercy*] is over all that he has made.

God knows what we are made of and **still** loves us, *still* has faith in us, *still* calls us to come closer, to listen more about God’s passionate love for the world, and to be blessed with renewed life. God *still* trains our gaze on those who suffer and die due to indifference, injustice, power grab and greed. God says through the prophets: “I’m going to love you anyway. I’m going to redeem you by my perfect love. I’m going to love you into wholeness” (see Isaiah 29:13–24; Hosea 6:1–6).

God mentors us on how to see, how to appreciate life, how to show compassion to others. No, healing and salvation are not just for me but for the whole cosmos, and God calls me to be part of God’s plan to save. Do I see those who struggle?

Faith is the acknowledgment that we are not self-sufficient and depend on Someone bigger, with a bigger imagination and bigger plans for us. This Someone knows us intimately and knows our needs even before we can dream of asking about them. This Someone is compassionate and merciful, able to give what we truly need abundantly and at the proper time. And what is given individually is intended for the wellbeing of all.

Faith is the invitation to share a **divine vision** (what the letter to the Hebrews calls the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, where a myriad of angels feast,¹ a kingdom that is firm and eternal and cannot be shaken)² where justice and mercy are palpable, where unity and joy are evident, where all belong and are alien and strangers no longer but citizens,³ where nobody is turned away on account of class, language, skin pigmentation, gender and sexual orientation.

¹ Hebrews 12:22

² Hebrews 12:28

³ Ephesians 2:19-22

Faith invites us to act appropriately to implement such vision. In response to God's mercy, we all can show both repentance and gratitude, and offer to God an acceptable worship with reverence and awe.⁴

Implementation involves clear vision and right speech where truth is acknowledged and freely spoken. It involves advocacy for the most vulnerable, denunciation of lies and moral corruption, restoration of justice, and rehabilitation of community. Faith, therefore, is not merely a passive waiting for a magical resolution to the evils of the world, but an active participation in a story larger than us, a story in which trust becomes the fertile soil for transformation and hope, the treasure we hold, and the light by which we walk.

Faith is a collective affair which requires collective engagement. Faith organizes around collective memory of divine intervention: salvation shows up in the life testimony of a great cloud of witnesses (Heb 12:1) committed to the thriving of communities and the wellbeing of creation.

The past gains as well as the horrific repressions and traumas of the past cannot be watered down, rewritten or denied without restrictive oppression for the present and dramatic downturn for the future. Honesty and truth need to be dearly safeguarded less we lose our humanity.

The collective memory of faith stories carries us to a collective building of God's kingdom. People of good will name the Holy and pursue what is just. Trust in a merciful and benevolent God allows us to partner with God and neighbor of any religious and social extraction in a movement of liberating justice and collective salvation. If something is true, no matter who said it, it is always from the Holy Spirit. (Thomas Aquinas, *De Veritate*)

Let us consider whom it is we want to model faith to. Whom do we care about and pray for them to have faith? Our children, other family members, the whole world? May our heart expand to the whole world with God's mercy. Amen.

⁴ Hebrews 12:28