

**TRINITY EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH  
MINOCQUA, WI  
SERMON FOR NOVEMBER 1 & 2, 2020**

***Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!  
How unsearchable are his judgments  
and how untraceable his ways!  
<sup>34</sup> “For who has known the mind of the Lord,  
or who has been his adviser?”  
<sup>35</sup> “Or who has first given to God  
that he will be repaid?”  
<sup>36</sup> For from him and through him and to him are all things.  
To him be the glory forever! Amen.***

(Romans 11:33-36 EHV)

What do you do when the questions you're asking don't have any answers? Why do some children die so young? Why do many die so suddenly, so senselessly, so randomly in natural disasters, plane crashes, workplace and school shootings, COVID-19 infections?

What do you do when the questions you're asking don't have any answers? We know what we do. We question God, we get angry, we tell him what we think, we tell him what to do. I know more than a few people who say things like, "When I get to heaven, God and I are going to have a talk about the way he's running things." I don't stand too close to these people during thunderstorms.

What do you do when the questions you're asking don't have any answers? For Martin Luther, the question was: How do I get right with God? What do I do with the guilt of my sin? What did he do? Oh, he anguished and agonized over it for years but finally searched the Scriptures/Word of God, and he found the answer. He found grace, God's undeserved grace, the discovery that served as the spark for the Lutheran Reformation.

And then he did what Paul did here at the end of Romans 11. He praised God. He offered praise **To God's Glory Alone**. ***“Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!...To him be the glory forever! Amen.”*** (vv. 33a,36b)

In the last three chapters – Romans 9-11, Paul's been dealing with the fact that his own people, the Jews/God's Old Testament chosen people, had for the most part rejected Jesus as the way of salvation. Even though Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles (non-Jews), he still held out hope for his own people, and rightly so. Salvation is by God's grace and mercy, not by race, culture, heritage or merit. Now, taking a step back and looking back over the first 11 chapters of this letter, looking back over God's gracious dealings with his own people and with all of sinful mankind, unable to fully comprehend just what God was doing, how and why, but grateful to be a part of it, Paul does the only thing he can do: he praises God for his wondrous ways, he bursts out into a song of praise:

***“Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how untraceable his ways! “For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his adviser?” “Or who has first given to God that he will be repaid?” For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever.”*** When in doubt, Paul seems to say, shout it out, declare God's praises.

Nearly 20 years ago, I was involved in a car accident in the driveway of the Post Office near the church I served in Phoenix. Upon investigation, the insurance company determined that the other driver was completely at fault, which required that her policy pay for damage to both vehicles. Thankful I wouldn't have to navigate further through such a potential legal & financial mess, I put the incident behind me.

Four months later, I received an envelope in the mail. It was addressed to Stephen Lutherland. Lutherland? Is that a theme park? The letter inside fell far short of bearing good tidings. It was from a claims management company demanding payment of \$1,156.92. The vehicle I drove the day of the accident was a rental car. Apparently, the rental company was not satisfied with the amount received and sought further assessments covering loss of use, loss of value, the hiring of staff to type the letter and lick the envelope and stick the stamp in the upper right hand corner of said envelope.

Long story short...my insurance company came to my rescue again, said I was not responsible for this claim and promised to handle this issue for me. In short, I should never have even received the letter. Still, this occurrence cost me a few days of uncertainty and stress and extra time to deal with it.

Satan operates like this. He knows our weak spots. He knows where we're most vulnerable to guilt and despair...and he attacks. "You're guilty. You're a loser. You'll pay for what you've done. There's no way God will forgive you." Which is exactly what we would expect from the father of lies. Martin Luther often spoke of fending off such attacks from Satan:

**When I go to bed, the Devil is always waiting for me. When he begins to plague me, I give him this answer, "Devil, I must sleep. That's God's command: 'Work by day. Sleep by night.' So go away." If that doesn't work and he brings out a catalog of sins, I say, "Yes, old fellow, I know all about it. And I know some more you have overlooked. Here are a few extra. Put them down (too)." When he felt especially pressed by Satan, Luther would throw at him 1 John 1:7 – "The blood of Jesus, (God's) Son, purifies me from all sin." Not one sin is unforgiven. Christ's perfect, sinless life and innocent shed blood paid the price for every sin, and his resurrection from the dead exposes Satan's jabs as lies and untruths.**

Only the Triune God could have/would have devised a way to be saved by grace alone through faith alone. Only the Triune God would have revealed this to us by Scripture alone and made it clear that life with him is found only in Christ alone. Only this Triune God would propose to come to us in such simple, small ways: the Gospel is preached, hearts turn to him in repentance and faith; water splashes, a child is pronounced a forgiven child of God; into our hands and mouths are placed wafer and wine with the very body and blood of the Lord Jesus that was given and shed for forgiveness. Paul's words of praise pour forth from our lips, as we give glory to God alone:

***"Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how untraceable his ways! "For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his adviser?" "Or who has first given to God that he will be repaid?" For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever."***

I especially love v. 35. It's a real slap down to anyone who thinks they can earn God's salvation, that they can earn God's favor: "Who has ever first given to (God), and has to be repaid (by God)?" The God who actually created and owns the universe doesn't owe you or me or any evangelical naval-gazing preacher anything. God refuses to relate to us on the basis of earning and merit and works. It just doesn't work. He deals with us in grace and mercy, offering forgiveness and sustaining us moment by moment with amazing, stunning gifts from his gracious, generous hands. ***"From Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever."***

But in the trenches of daily life, in the battles we face, we still struggle. Oh, how we struggle. How can we be sure to do what Paul does, take a step back, and in the midst of everything, above all else, offer praise to the glory of God alone?

Two things here. First, a soldier from World War II was hesitant to talk about his experiences fighting on the front lines. A friend asked him, "What struck you most/made the greatest impression on you during those fierce battles?" "The thing that struck me most," replied the veteran soldier, "was the number of bullets that missed me."

Generally, people (we) are puzzled by the number of bullets (afflictions and hardships) that hit and don't even think about the many that miss: the accidents that didn't occur, the diseases that didn't strike, the financial challenges that didn't develop. Yet, the many daily protections and joys we experience under God's

wisdom and knowledge and protection ought to astound us. We have every reason to praise God for the bullets that miss.

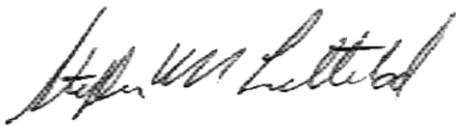
Secondly, when dealing with the bullets that do hit, the hardships/challenges/struggles that weigh us down, the unanswered questions of Why?/How?/What?, rather than blame God or look elsewhere for help, we will do what God's people have done since the beginning of time: we will seek the never-changing, life-giving Word of God.

- In time of trial, rather than blame God for things I don't understand, I will remember that he sees the big picture, that he holds me in the palm of his hand and close to his heart. I will praise him for promising that he won't give me more than I can handle and that he does answer my prayers in his own time and in his own way – always for the best. Sometimes God's answer to Why/How/What is ***"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."*** (2 Corinthians 12:9)
- When someone dies, or when we ourselves face death, we will not blame God. Remembering that our times are in his hands, we will praise him with the words of Job: ***"Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised."*** (Job 1:21)
- Whenever we don't understand something/anything, and we search in vain for answers, we will remember the wondrous ways of our God: ***"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the Lord. "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)

The composer Johann Sebastian Bach considered his life's calling was writing music to the glory of God. Bach believed, along with the Reformers, that the performance of any God-pleasing vocation was glorifying to God. Fueled by his Lutheran faith, Bach devoted his life to creating music for refreshment, proclamation, and praise—primarily for the church. Born 150 years after Luther, Bach was a true son of the Reformation, devoted to Christ, and a firm believer in giving glory to God.

Bach was a hard worker, not your stereotypical artsy lazy romanticized dreamer. He served as teacher and worship leader for several churches (at one time serving four churches at once), and he was the father of 20 children. He wrote over 10,000 pages of music in his career as a church musician. At the beginning of most are the initials "J.J." for Jesu juva ("Jesus, help me"), and at the bottom of every one of them appear the letters S.D.G.—Sola Deo Gloria—"To God Alone Be The Glory!"

May you, dear Christian, by the grace of God, write Jesu Juva and Soli Deo Gloria at the beginning and end of each day. May you, dear Christian, by the grace of God, write Jesu Juva and Soli Deo Gloria at the beginning and end of everything you do. Jesus, help me. To God alone be the glory.



Pastor Stephen Luchterhand  
Minocqua, WI