

SERMON FOR LENTEN SERVICE FOUR

TEXT: MICAH 7: 18-20

THEME: LOVE THAT DEALS THOROUGHLY WITH SIN

Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity
and passing over transgression
for the remnant of his inheritance?
He does not retain his anger forever,
because he delights in steadfast love.

He will again have compassion on us;
he will tread our iniquities underfoot.
You will cast all our sins
into the depths of the sea.

You will show faithfulness to Jacob
and steadfast love to Abraham,
as you have sworn to our fathers
from the days of old.

In the name of Jesus:

There was once a man whose backyard was being churned up and ruined by moles. Their raised tunnels were everywhere, and their little raised piles of dirt dotted the yard. And so, he went to war. He was determined to rid that yard of moles. He placed rodent poison in their tunnels. He set up menacing looking traps with a trip lever and sharp metal spikes. He tried flooding them out of their tunnels with a water hose and then whacking them, when they emerged, with a shovel. He tried gassing them out of their tunnels by hooking up a hose to the exhaust pipe of his car. He even read somewhere

that Juicy Fruit gum would kill moles, so he put some of that down there. He was determined to kill or banish those moles, so determined that he went about it in every way conceivable. Kind of like our God, in his great love for us, gets rid of the guilt of our sin, in just about every conceivable way. For the record, God is more successful with our sin than this man is in his crusade against the moles. And, for the record, the Juicy Fruit gum doesn't do much of anything. But our need to be rid of our sin before God—it can't be compared to the nuisance of some burrowing rodents in a backyard. In fact, there is nothing that can really compare with the need to have our sin and our guilt before God dealt with and removed. And there is also nothing that we can compare with the joy and freedom and blessing and hope that comes when, through Jesus Christ, God grants us full pardon and forgiveness.

The book of Micah is not all sunshine and roses. God sent the prophet Micah to rebuke his people for their injustices and their unbelief. The rich were oppressing the poor. The political rulers and the religious leaders had become corrupt and greedy. The people had turned aside to false gods and false hopes. Micah warned God's people that terrible judgment was coming. During Micah's lifetime, the northern kingdom of Israel was wiped out by foreign invaders, and the southern kingdom of Judah nearly was also. Yet, interspersed between Micah's strong warnings and threats are repeated

announcements of hope. A new ruler will come; a new king will be born, in Bethlehem, of Judea. All the nations of the earth will stream to the God of Israel, to know him, to learn of his ways. God himself will take the great problem of the people's sin into his own hands. He will show his faithfulness and his steadfast love to his people. He has sworn that he will be their help. He will take his anger over sin, and he will set it aside, because he delights in showing love. And God will display the greatness of his love by grasping hold of their sins and throw them to the ground, stomping them down under his feet into nothingness. And this is what Jesus has done, taking on all of your guilt and sin and stomping these to nothing.

In another wonderful description of what God has done for you in Christ, He has taken your sin from you, and he has cast it, thrown it, hurled it way out into the ocean, so that your sins have sunk down into depths, never to be mentioned or heard of or noticed again, never to bother you again, never to separate you again from your God and from his enormous love.

Isaiah tells us that Christ has borne them, Jesus has carried them. They were too heavy for us, and so God has lifted them off us, and placed them on Christ. He has carried them, as a sacrificial lamb. He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Jesus is like the Old Testament scapegoat. In the Old Testament book of Leviticus, the Festival of the Day of Atonement, or

Yom Kippur, was commanded by God. On this day, once a year, the high priest would confess his sins and the sins of the whole people of God while laying his hands on the head of a goat, and the goat would then be sent off into the wilderness, carrying with him, far, far away, the sins of the people. It was a picture of the way that God would deal with our sins, of how God now has dealt with our sins, in Jesus.

God has done this for you, so that He would deal with you in love. Just as the Psalmist writes: ““He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.” If you go to Google Maps and check the distance between Cleveland and Lancaster, it would say it is 175 miles. If you check the distance between Lancaster and Portland, it is 2055 miles. But if you ask Google how far the east is from west. Well, it can't answer that for you. In fact, if you Google it, it will just take you to discussions of this Psalm verse. Even Google knows that God has removed your sins far from you.

God has made you pure and clean, from head to toe, because of Jesus. Your life is clean; your heart is pure; so that you may praise Him to all of His glory. God, in mercy, has refined you.. Like gold or other precious metals that are corrupted with impurities, God's forgiveness is like a fire which burns

away all that is worthless and foul—our sins—and leaves something golden and precious to God in its place.

Many today think of God as a judge on a bench, who you stand before in judgment. But God does not judge, He forgives, for He abounds in love and mercy and is actively working all things out to your good.

God has forgiven you all of your sins, He has trampled them underfoot, He has washed them away, He has forgotten them from his mind, and declared them gone— so that you can be certain that the sins that separated you from God and from having joy in God's presence forever—they are gone. And what remains is God's enormous love for you. All on account of Jesus.

Amen