

Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost  
August 17, 2008

**Romans 11:33-36 (New International Version)**

<sup>33</sup>Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and<sup>[a]</sup> knowledge of God!  
How unsearchable his judgments,  
and his paths beyond tracing out!  
<sup>34</sup>"Who has known the mind of the Lord?  
Or who has been his counselor?"<sup>[b]</sup>  
<sup>35</sup>"Who has ever given to God,  
that God should repay him?"<sup>[c]</sup>  
<sup>36</sup>For from him and through him and to him are all things.

Some people think they have to be the center of attention. You can always hear their loud voice and laughter. You might be in the midst of a conversation with somebody, but they will interrupt and never let the two of you return to your speaking. God wants to be the center of our lives. In the First Commandment, He tells us to have no other gods. Is He being like that inconsiderate bag of wind? Not at all—the truth stands out in this text:

GOD HAS NO EQUAL  
I. In His wisdom  
II. In His goodness  
III. In His praise

Although God has no equal in His wisdom, sometimes we are presumptuous enough to challenge that wisdom. We want to know why events in our lives occur or we question some of His teachings in the Bible. In today's First Lesson, Moses noted that He did as the Lord directed, asking the Pharaoh to let his people leave Egypt, and now the Israelites were suffering tougher conditions of slavery. Where was the justice in that? Or consider Job. As he wrestled with his great losses and the accusations of his friends who told him his troubles were due to great sin that needed to be repented of, he expressed the desire to quiz God about what He was doing. The Lord directed to him a series of questions, such as was Job there at the creation of the world or could he explain the ways of nature and various animals. The text reflects a similar thought: "Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?" The implied answer, "No one," impresses on us that we don't give advice to God.

Paul had just discussed some knotty issues in his letter to the Romans. He had spoken of the doctrine of election, how the Lord chose us in eternity to be His own, and also how the Jews were God's chosen people in the Old Testament and received many privileges yet rejected the Savior. Therefore God was bringing the Gentiles into His family. Those matters lead to the question, "Why do some people believe and not others?" Repeating only what the Bible reveals, that all credit belongs to God if we believe and all blame belongs on us if we do not believe, fails to satisfy our human logic. But to take it any further results in false teaching, either crediting man with a contribution to salvation or blaming God for damnation.

There are lots of matters in which we recognize we can't trace God's paths. We may try, but only get lost in a maze. We must humbly admit God has no equal in His wisdom.

The Lord does not display His wisdom merely to impress us or to show off. His major focus is the salvation of the world. Why did He not condemn us all? He certainly would have every right to do so. We were lost in sin. We were born in it and we live in it every day we breathe on this earth. We often ignore God and His Word and His will. We mistreat our neighbor. We are filled with greedy, hateful, and lustful thoughts. We say nasty things. How could God forgive us and justify us, that is, declare us righteous, as Paul had announced earlier?

That's where His unsearchable wisdom comes in. He devised the plan in eternity and sent His own Son into the world as the unique God-man to work out the plan. Jesus lived a perfect life on this

earth to supply the righteousness God's law required of us. He suffered the pains of hell and died on the cross for the guilt of our sins. Jesus paid the price and achieved the purpose for which He came. You are fully forgiven, holy in God's sight, and welcome in His heaven.

The Lord also brought that gift which Jesus won for the world to you personally. He planned and directed the events of your life so you heard the gospel. The Holy Spirit's power led you to believe it. It was no accident as to the family you were born into, whom you married or where you lived. Whatever it took to bring the saving message of Jesus to you, God arranged. Who could figure that all out? Only one who is perfectly wise.

God's wisdom continues to operate daily for you. He still is directing everything so that it benefits your faith. Life's events reinforce, strengthen and support you spiritually. Even troubles do so, as St. Paul reminded us earlier in his letter. Such times can exercise and test faith, which is beneficial. The Lord knows the limits of what you can endure so that your faith is not hurt. He provides His power to equip you for resistance to temptation. He knows what He is doing. He doesn't need advice from us.

So recognize His wisdom and submit to His plan. Even when you do not understand, follow the leadership of God, who has no equal. This is truly an instance where Father knows best.

## II.

It's one thing to be smart. It is another to use your knowledge well. God also has no equal in His goodness. He is in debt to no one. Again Paul asked, "Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?" He owns all that exists so needs nothing. The answer to the question posed in the text is, "Absolutely no one." If God did pay us what we deserve, we would have a miserable life now and hell eternally. Even the best we have to offer Him is unacceptable, for it is marred by sin.

The Lord God is the world's greatest giver. "From him and through him...are all things." He is the source of life along with its necessities and enjoyments. We would not remain in existence without His continued care. God not only designed the human race but He brought us into being individually. We marvel during the Olympics at the accomplishments of the athletes. We cannot all achieve at such a level, and many of us not even close to that, but we are marvelously made. Our organs, body parts, senses and their functions together are amazing. If you get a cut, the skin quickly heals. Our bodies have disease-resisting capacities. God did a stellar job in making us.

His goodness brings us daily provision. He supplies the ability and opportunity to work and grants effective work. We receive blessings through that work: food, clothing, and shelter. He maintains our health and safety. We enjoy the blessings of family and friends. Even when life ends we recognize that each day we lived was an undeserved gift.

Of even greater value are the spiritual blessings history's greatest giver supplies. He feeds our faith and provides daily forgiveness for the sins we rack up. What if the Savior said, "I took care of the past wrongs. It's time for you to handle the rest."? Would you be any better off than you were in the first place? One sin merits eternal death. That's a debt we cannot pay. So we need and appreciate God's work for us. As we look to the fall schedule at church we look forward to abundant opportunities to feast on Christ's message. There is the return of Sunday School and the Lutheran Elementary School for our children. Bible classes for teens and adults resume. Lakeside Lutheran High School provides Christian education during the vital teen years. We will inaugurate small group Bible studies and the new Crosswalk service and study evening. Blessings galore! No one is like our God. He has no equal in goodness.

## III.

It is only fitting then that God has no equal in His praise. Praise is our response as we survey His wisdom and goodness. Some astounding events leave us speechless. That happens here as far as questioning or challenging God is concerned. If He did all that for me, who am I to demand an accounting? Other circumstances trigger profuse and overflowing expressions of gratitude. We can't say enough or find adequate words to convey our thanks, so we bubble with joy. That happens here as we praise God. The Apostle leads us in exclaiming, "To him be the glory forever! Amen."

We offer praise in worship. God's greatness affects our attitude. We want to worship Him. As King David said, "I rejoiced with those who said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the Lord.'" Coming to worship is not a drudgery. We are happy for the opportunity. We will prepare for worship. We will be ready to come. We plan to attend and think in advance about what we will hear, perhaps reviewing the readings during the previous week. We will be rested, not dragging from excesses the night before. Our eagerness to praise God will show in our frequency of worship. We will come regularly, striving to be here each weekend and for special seasons and festivals. We come to receive a feast for our soul in the message of the Gospel, offered in Word and sacrament.

We praise God in our witness. We can't contain the good news of Jesus. We tell others about our joy in the Savior. We know the value of the message so we wouldn't think of hoarding it for ourselves. We pass on the gospel to the next generation. We share it with co-workers and friends.

Praise of the Lord rings out in our life. Paul wrote, "To him are all things." We dedicate our existence, our whole being and all we have and are to His glory. We show it by obeying the commandments, avoiding evil and pursuing good. We look to His standards, not the opinions of the world around us. With Paul we state a hearty "Amen." Absolutely, I agree. God has no equal. We've said it. Now go out and live it. However, not always do we recognize these truths or practice them. We ask the Lord to forgive us. He does! Come and have the burden of sin lifted. Go forth renewed.

God doesn't bully His way into the center of our lives. But the fact remains: He is what it's all about. We depend on Him. He is the source of everything we have and enjoy, now and eternally. Rejoice in the Lord, who has no equal. Live in thanks and praise daily.