**Unacceptable Losses**

Based on [Genesis 18:17-33](http://biblia.com/books/esv/Ge18.17-33)

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Pentecost 10

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*Based especially on the OT lesson, especially this verse, "****Then Abraham drew near and said, "Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked?"*** *(Genesis 18:23).*

The past couple of weeks in my absence, you have heard readings from the Luther's Large Catechism dealing with Prayer and the Lord's Prayer. And today's Gospel lesson is Jesus giving his disciples the Lord's Prayer. You'll notice, the first thing he teaches them to say in prayer is "Our Father." This means that God is familiar with us, even family. If you ask a stranger for help, you might not get it, or you might get it grudgingly, or you might have to ask and beg repeatedly until he changes his mind. But you ask your Father, and he's there and ready to help.

Praying "Our Father" is a recognition that we can call upon the Almighty God as dear children call upon their dear Father, because He cares about us and our well being. He gives us our daily bread freely; he forgives our trespasses, he guards us from temptation and delivers us from evil. When you know God for who He is, gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love; the threats and fears of this world and this life lose their edge, for although satan can come and harrass us, though earthly enemies can harm our bodies, our soul and eternal wellbeing are in the hands of our heavenly Father. What reason have we to fear?

It's only if God is distant and disinterested in us that we would need to worry. Because a distant God might not bother himself with our wellbeing, in which case we would be foolish *not* to take matters into our own hands. If God were not involved with us as a loving father, we might have to lie, to cheat, to steal, even kill to secure our wellbeing and the wellbeing of those under our care. Consider, the Second World War and how it ended. Why did President Truman think it necessary to drop the bomb and kill innocent people? Because he thought he had to kill some innocent people to save even more innocent people in the long run. Speaking in a human way, there were wicked people in Japan, and there were righteous people. In order to wipe out the wicked, he had to bomb the righteous too. The only reason someone would feel they needed to murder for some "greater good", is if they didn't believe that God was looking after the greater good Himself.

All this to make two points about God, first that God is not distant or disinterested in the affairs of the world. He is involved in every government and every earthly claim to power whether they realize it or not. The righteous he leads by the hand; the wicked he drags around by the nose (e.g., Ezekiel 39:2, et. al). In either case, he is ***not*** (as they say) "too heavenly minded to be of no earthly good." He is involved in all things, and works in all things.

Second, not only is God near to us and working in all things, but he works them for the Good of those who love him (Romans 8:28). And this is what faith remembers in prayer, that whatever it looks like, however messy the war gets, God is your heavenly Father, and true Fathers love and care for each and every one of their children.

And so God is your heavenly Father. he loves and cares for you. Though your sins are as sacrlet, you are righteous in his eyes. And when problems of this life assail you take comfort in this: He doesn't wipe out the righteous with the wicked.

Most of the time in movies or in real life even it's easy to tell the good guys from the bad guys. The bad guys are always the ones who are willing to sacrifice innocent people to get things done. After WWI, you could tell the communists were the bad guys. I seem to recall a movie once, I think it was Dr. Zhivago, where a Bolshevik commander said that to be a communist soldier, one has to be willing to kill his own family for the sake of "the party." Killing innocent people for your own ambitions and ideology---BAD! In order to exact revenge on people, mobsters will go after their families. Muslim extremists send their sons and followers to be suicide bombers. Hitler was never afraid to throw out the baby with the bathwater, and kill the innocent to accomplish his genocidal ends. And dare I say, in the second World War, the USA took "the evil way out" by dropping nuclear bombs on *civillians, innocent* that were obliterated for the sake of the greater good. Bad guys don't regard the guilt or the innocence of a person, they are concerned only with their goals...and whoever gets in the way of them must be swiftly and decisively swept away.

But Our Heavenly Father, does not sweep away the righteous with the wicked. He didn't in the past and he will not in the future. In the days of Noah, He dropped a flood upon the whole earth, drowning everyone because “**He saw the whole earth was wicked**.” However, he saw one righteous man, and he saved him and his family while the rest of the world was justly punished and destroyed. Indeed he swept away the wicked, but he preserved the righteous.

In fact, Jesus came preaching the kingdom of God and he expressed his Father's will in this way. And he once told this parable*.* ***24****Another parable He put forth to them, saying: “The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field;****25****but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat and went his way.****26****But when the grain had sprouted and produced a crop, then the tares also appeared.****27****So the servants of the owner came and said to him, ‘Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?’****28****He said to them, ‘An enemy has done this.’ The servants said to him, ‘Do you want us then to go and gather them up?’****29****But he said, ‘No, lest while you gather up the tares you also uproot the wheat with them.****30****Let both grow together until the harvest, and at the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, “First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn.”’”(Matthew 13:24-30).*

You see, when there are weeds in his garden, God refuses to pull the weeds too soon because it is unacceptable to him to lose even one precious grain of wheat. The wheat are the righteous, the tares, the wicked, and the point is this...**God would never, ever, ever put the righteous to death with the wicked.** For it is impossible for God to abandon the righteous.

That is really the premise of our Old Testament lesson...**whether the almighty God--(whose prerogative it is to destroy all wickedness and evil)--whether He would like a clumsy butcher, cut down a few righteous while he's cutting off the wicked.** In the military they call it "acceptable loss"...**it's when a commander decides to strike a major blow against the enemy, but in doing so knows that he will end up killing a few of his own.** These few soldiers who will be wiped away with the enemy are unceremoniously called "acceptable losses."

Acceptable losses happen when you live in a broken world. The question that Abraham had for God in our OT lesson is, **do "acceptable losses" happen in the kingdom of heaven? Do acceptable losses happen when God is the commander-in-chief?**

Our OT lesson involves God having a dialogue with Abraham, who is the Grandfather of the nation of Israel, a huge figure in the Old Testament. He knew God personally, and was even called "**the friend of God", probably because of their many deep conversations.** Abraham had more than a few direct dialogues with God, and today we see one of them. Abraham is God's friend, so God decides he shouldn't hide what he's planning to do. **He reveals to Abraham that he's going to wipe out the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah...utterly destroy them.** When Abraham hears this he is worried. He thinks of his nephew Lot, who lived with his family in Sodom. Lot was a righteous man who feared God and yet if God would wipe out Sodom, Lot would be swept away with the wicked.

But Abraham knows God and knows that He is righteous in all his doings, and so he asks the Lord, "**Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked? Suppose there are fifty righteous men within the city. Will you consider them "acceptable losses?"** Then Abraham, knowing the character of his God and friend says, **"Far be it from you to do such a thing, to put the righteous to death with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is Just?"**

You see, God is not just some "John Doe" to Abraham. To Abraham he is Lord and friend. He is Abraham's heavenly Father. And so Abraham continues to press the point in meekness and humility, "**O Lord, what if there are 45, 40, 30, 20, 10...what if ten righteous are found there?**" And God says, "**For the sake of 10, I will not destroy the city."**

Of course, Ladies and Gentlemen, ten is not the magic number. God is Just, and so by implication, if God finds even one righteous person in Sodom, he will not burn the place to the ground. And so what happens? He burns it down. He sent two angels to Lot's house to rescue him and his family, and the angels lead Lot and his family out of town...and once Lot had left town, there was no one righteous in Sodom...and so God unleashed his wrath and Sodom was destroyed. There were no "acceptable losses" because God rescued the righteous, and everyone else was the enemy.

Sodom happened many thousands of years ago, but the very same God rules heaven and earth today. The upshot of Abraham's conversation with God is that God would never put the righteous to death with the wicked, and that Sodom would be spared if there were only ten [presumably even just one] righteous men in the city.

As it was then, so it is now. When God looks upon the wickedness and sin of mankind we deserve destruction. He would spare us if there was even just one righteous man that dwelt with us.  But, according to the flesh none of us are righteous, no not one (Psalm 53:3).  And so what does a righteous God do? What does a just God do? What does a God do who considers the death of even one righteous man an **unacceptable loss**?

Well here's what He did:  **He sent his only begotten Son to BE that one righteous man, even Jesus Christ...whose presence among us has stayed God's wrath until the final judgment.** For Christ, *became sin for us*, and God unleashed his wrath upon him. He bore our sins and carried our iniquities, and what about us? We became his righteousness. We who have put on Christ, we who have received Christ in baptism, in communion, in hearing and believing his words **are righteous in the eyes of God**. When God looks at his baptized church, he doesn't see your sin, instead he sees the body of his own Son, the ONE and ONLY righteous man.

But the church is still the ark, which means a flood is coming. The day of final Judgment will come. The day of justice and reckoning. For now, God looks upon the earth and sees the righteous amongst the wicked. He sees the wheat among the tares. He sees you, His holy Christian church amidst the wicked world, and he will not destroy the world while the church remains. **As long as baptized and communing Christians dwell on earth, God will not destroy it.** But a time is coming when Jesus Christ will remove his sacramental presence from the world, and will remove his church from the earth. A time is coming when, as the scriptures say, **Christ will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God.**"  And he will come to judge and destroy.  As it was for Sodom, so will it be for the world in that day.

In that day there will not be a single righteous man left in all the earth.   In that day he comes in clouds of glory, the dead will rise, and the church, the scriptures say, will ASCEND to meet him in the air. St. Paul writes, "**For the dead in Christ will rise first.  Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds TO MEET THE LORD IN THE AIR, and so we will always be with the Lord**" (1 Thessalonians 4:17) We will always be with the righteous one whom God will never destroy. When Christ and his church "meet in the air," there will be none left righteous on the earth to suffer the wrath to come..

God will destroy the wicked world, he will pull the weeds, but don't worry, because there will be no "**acceptable losses**." Not one grain of wheat will be lost...only weeds. For all who have put on Christ will be saved. All who are clothed in his righteousness will not be swept away. And then amidst the ashes of the old creation, God will plant a new creation, a new heaven and a new earth, a new Jerusalem and holy city...a promised land where all who have been washed in the blood of the lamb will live forever.

So three "Take home points" points for today. First, God is near to you and aware of the cares of your heart. He is not distant and preoccupied with bigger problems than yours; his biggest concern is your problems, not the ones you think you have, but those that would truly threaten to destroy you. He is more concerned with your life than you are. He is closer to you than you are to yourself.

Second, Not only is he aware, but he cares for your eternal well being. And though it may not seem like it now, what he ordains for your life is always good. This means you don't have the weight of the world on your shoulders, but you can live a simple life of holiness, walking in the way of the lord. Hating your enemies and holding grudges is anxious and pointless work and makes for a complicated life. God promises that he will avenge and he will save and this is not your business. Rather, you are free to love your enemies, not repaying evil for evil, but always seeking to do good to one another and to everyone. This is true peace. Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

Third and finally, God will again reap judgment upon the world sweep away the wicked, but He will not sweep you away. Though you are a sinner according to the weakness of your flesh, that is not who you really are...not anymore. You were once dead in your trespasses, but God has forgiven you and made you alive in Christ. You were baptized into the Christ and are clothed in his righteousness and on that account stand to inherit the riches of heaven someday. The day of wrath is coming, you can see the signs in the shameless wickedness at work in the world. The world is storing up wrath for itself on the day of Judgment, and it will be a fearsome to behold. But God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us that we might live with him. We live with him in humility for now suffering for righteousness sake and bearing our crosses with joy, but in the day of our Lord he has glory waiting for and joy that will not end. Such is the good and gracious will of your Heavenly Father.