

## Mondays in Lent: Love and Mercy Have No Bound

March 7, 2022

As we journey in Lent, we begin in the ashes. Marked by the dust and aware of our own humanity, separation from God and sin. This creates in us a desire for confession, repentance, and penance. Fasting, prayer and acts of obedient charity fill the days of our Lenten journey. But we begin in the ashes. As we process from the darkness of Ash Wednesday and the confession of our own humanity, there is a glimmer of hope.

Today's reading from Romans 10:8b-13 shines the light by declaring that salvation is available for all.

### **Romans 10:8b-13 (NRSV)**

But what does it say?

'The word is near you,  
on your lips and in your heart'

(that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved. The scripture says, 'No one who believes in him will be put to shame.' For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him. For, 'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'

Many in the Community of Christ are heavily persuaded towards near universalism by traditions and doctrinal innovations dating back to the 1830s and with roots in the active number of universalist congregations in and around the Finger Lakes region of Western New York where our denominational movement has its roots.

As many say, we often sing our theology best. "Great and Marvelous Are Thy Works" strikes me as relevant to the theme of *near* universal salvation. The author and composer of the hymn is Charles Gabriel, who was born and raised on a farm in Wilton, Iowa (Muscatine County).

Great and marvelous are thy works,  
O Lord of hosts, almighty One!  
Earth and firmament speak thy praise;  
thy name is written in the sun.

*Sing of his mighty love, for it is wonderful;  
let his praise through all the earth resound;  
honor and majesty now and forever be  
unto God whose love and mercy have no bound.*

Charles Gabriel wrote in his autobiography, “60 Years of Gospel Song” of his own sense of assurance of God’s saving grace:

*I shall say good-bye to those I have loved and who have been friends to me, knowing that while I must leave them for a while, yet, in the great judgment morning when the countless millions of those “who die in the Lord” shall arise and come surging and thronging from every corner of the earth to stand before Him who was, and is, and shall forever more be, I know that my friends will be among that number, and that I shall know them again.*

Community of Christ has long sung enthusiastically of God’s boundless love and mercy. This is a message of universal inclusion and salvation with roots in “The Vision” of celestial, telestial and terrestrial glories found in Section 76 of the Doctrine and Covenants. This imaginative vision shared by Joseph Smith, Jr. and Sidney Rigdon in February of 1832 contains similar themes to the hymn, stating that “great and marvelous are the works of the Lord.”

While few pay close attention to the details of “the vision” today, many have inherited the ethic of universal grace as a part of their faith heritage and shared experience in Community of Christ.

The passage in Romans states that ‘Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.’ This quotes Peter’s sermon at Acts 2:21 where Peter is in turn quoting Joel:

*And everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved; for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be deliverance, as the LORD has promised, among the remnant called by the LORD. (Joel 2:32 NRSV)*

Is it any wonder that our Ash Wednesday scriptural focus begins with Joel? On this Monday in Lent, as we look back to Romans it is worthwhile to remind ourselves about how Paul described the experience of calling upon the name of the Lord “with sighs too deep for words.” The confession that brings salvation may not even need to be spoken to be experienced.

While the human tendency is to draw lines and borders that keep others out, the echoes of voices across time remind us of a “God whose love and mercy have no bound.”

(Glenn Johnson)