



SIEBENQUELL

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**Reflection on 1 Jn 4, 7-16**

# **So that we might live through**

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SOURCE: ROSEMARIE MONNERJAHN 2014

Within a very short time, a woman heard two homilies. Both homilies had mercy as their topic. But the woman was restless, because during the first homily she felt a growing feeling of uncertainty rise up in her, as the preacher repeatedly emphasized the unworthiness, sin and ingratitude of the human person in order to then look at mercy. In the second homily, she was greatly comforted and strengthened, for the homilist emphasized the power and breadth of the mercy of God and how it is stronger than sin. Now the good woman was fairly unsettled and asked me how it could be, since both homilies dealt with the same topic, namely, mercy.

When we tell the stories of mercy, then the confusion of this woman is not all that surprising. For there are, in fact, two stories of mercy floating about. In the first homily, we experience the first form of storytelling. Here sin is the instigator, and only then does God develop mercy as a strategy with which to respond to sin. In this story, mercy is an afterthought. In this way of telling the story, sin takes the initiative. It sets everything in motion, including God. **Because** we were such great sinners, mercy comes. **Because** we live in such ingratitude, mercy comes. **Because** we act so unworthily, mercy comes. It is clearly emphasized, that sin has set God in motion, and that mercy is God's response to the initiative of sin.

We know this form of the story only too well. Ironically, it is not really a story about mercy, but rather a thinly veiled opportunity to speak about the power and scope of sin.

By contrast, John writes an essential word: **»In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins.«**

John emphasises that mercy (love) is the initiative of God and that it comes first. Love (mercy) comes before sin. The mercy of God can and does deal with sin, because it is older than sin.

When John tells the story, the mercy of God is not reduced to a strategy to deal with sin. For we need mercy, even when we have not sinned. We need it when we are tired, exhausted, adrift or wounded. This divine initiative of mercy is needed when we are sick, fearful, intimidated, lonely, depressed, discouraged, disillusioned or simply worn. These are moments when God repeatedly speaks the first word, makes the first move, and takes the initiative. But they are not sins.

Mercy is love that has taken the initiative, that does not wait until something happens to which it must respond. When we do not have the strength, the courage or the possibility of acting lovingly, mercy, of its own accord, creates the space for life for God's people. **\*God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him.\***

So that we might live through him! This is altogether a different kind of story, for here the main role is played by God, and not by sin. What kind of story of God could possibly have anyone else in the leading role? Therefore we watchful and wary of the storytellers in your life and ask the essential question. **»Who play the leading role in your stories?«**

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