

Are you merciful? A sermon preached at St. Giles' Presbyterian Church, Prince George, BC on March 18, 2018 by Rev. Herb Hilder.

Lessons: PSALM 86:1-5
 HEBREWS 4:14-16
 MATTHEW 5:7

Remember some weeks back when we began reflecting on the Beatitudes in Matthew **ble^ssed are the poor in spirit – the humble**-- I told about the conversation I once had with an individual about humility?

I began with a question----Do you consider yourself to be a humble person. After a time of reflective silence, the individual replied ...no,...no Herb I don't think so, but I would be proud to be so!

This morning,
 I think Jesus is asking of his listeners – *are you merciful?*
 For it crystal clear Jesus sees the characteristic, the attitude,
 The action of mercy as very important in the lives of each person who says, JSUS IS LORD, JESUS IS MY SAVIOUR
 I HAVE DECIDED TO FOLLOW JESUS.

Equally clear,

Is that mercy is not a quality we see a lot in our world.

Our eyes, ears, emotions are assaulted daily, even hourly on TV and by radio and the social media by violence,

Injustice, willful stubbornness – mulishness’
Entitlement, bigotry, prejudice and intolerance.

This is not to say mercy is not admired.

It indeed is!

Acts of mercy,

Merciful treatment of people toward each other makes headlines – replete with pictures, commentaries, and editorials.

I wonder why mercy is so often the exception rather than the rule – particularly when this happens among God’s people.

I wonder have we?

Are we paying too much attention to the world’s voices and not the voice of Jesus?

You have no doubt heard the world’s Beatitudes

Happy are the “pushers”, for they get on in the world

Happy are the hard-boiled: for they never let life hurt them.

Happy are they who complain; for they get their own way in the end.

Happy are the blasé: for they never worry over their sins.

Happy are the slave-drivers: for they get results.

Happy are the knowledgeable men of the world: for they know their way around.
 Happy are the trouble-makers: for they make people take notice of them.

I wonder – are we afraid of showing mercy, because it will make us vulnerable

For being merciful is to be vulnerable – and that is real scary for many
 Ours is a world where emotional detachment is the default position.

I wonder if we are less merciful in our lives because we can point to an incident or incidents in our lives where being merciful,
 Showing mercy as Jesus and the scriptures mean it has resulted in us being emotionally ripped to shreds.

We do not want to experience that again, so we metaphorically cross to the other side when we see a person in distress.

I wonder...

As with all the other Beatitudes – vs 7 is quite clear.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy

Consider then the question – ARE YOU MERCIFUL?

Jesus is searching and testing each one of us.

He is reminding us that to follow Him is not just about talk, it is about action.

It is not about Sunday or holy time only behavior, outlook, thoughts and imagination,
It is about ALL behavior, outlook, thoughts and imagination.

Are you merciful?

Before you answer, as each of us must.

For mercy and being merciful are not optional extras in the Christian life,

Do you remember from where all the calls from Jesus ultimately come?

Not from a self-help book on Indigo shelves or Amazon online.

Not from something we just generate within ourselves

Not from genetic mapping

Not from our ancestors

ULTIMATELY, mercy comes from God

Mercy comes into our lives – *as we realize the depth of God's mercy to each of us first.*

I have long maintained – owing to its scriptural examples and warrants,

But also because I have seen it played out in my life and in the lives of others again and again – *the degree to which we can offer and accept forgiveness and mercy,*

Live as forgiven by God people is predicated on the level of acceptance and gratefulness of God's forgiveness and mercy of us first.

Jesus was a master storyteller was he not?
 Rather than just making a declaratory statement,
 Jesus often tied a central teaching to a stories that
 continue to unsettle us,
 Make us do some self-examination
 Two stories come to mind when we speak about the
 mercy to which we are being called by Jesus in
 chapter 5 of Matthew
 The Good Samaritan and the Unjust or unmerciful
 servant
 --the Samaritan who stops to look after the beaten
 and robbed man, after several others had passed by.
 The unjust or unmerciful servant who is forgiven a
 great debt,
 But cannot reciprocate with regard to a much
 smaller debt owed to him by a fellow servant

Are you merciful?

How do you treat those who are different?
 Those who seem a little odd to you?
 Those who come from a different culture or
 upbringing.
 I've seen church people deal with cashiers in stores
 As if the cashiers are sub-human
 And hospitality staff like pirates dealt with tavern
 Wenches

The service industry is hard work on minimum or
Less wages.

Merciful people treat accepting people

They see everyone as an equal – a person whom
God loves and for whom Jesus died.

I have always treated support people
Cashiers, hospitality staff with a respect that
I think everyone deserves

To do this is such a simple thing to do...

*Merciful people realize God's goal is to take all of the
different people He made and make them like-minded in
Jesus so that God is glorified.*

*When someone makes a mistake do you rub it in or rub it
out?*

*Are you gleeful? Is their mistake a source of new gossip
for you?*

*OR do you offer to help and be supportive through this
time?*

The world is filled with far too many people
who are waiting for others to make mistakes – for
when others make mistakes, it makes them look
good!

Sadly, I have seen this too often in
communities of faith – and by the way, one time is
too often.

*Merciful people know and live by the truth – there
but for the grace of God, go I*

*Merciful people know all too well about the power of
temptation*

Merciful people do not finger point – they lend a helping hand!

Think of Jesus' story of the Good Samaritan.

The Samaritan does not only offer a helping hand. He ensures the man will be taken care of until the Samaritan returns

Contrast that with those who ought
Not to have passed by on the other side,
Or were too busy,
Or did not want to be involved.

When someone is suffering, a merciful person does not mind getting involved.

He or she is willing to spend time

Or even offer financial assistance if that seems best

He or she is willing to offer a non-judgmental ear, to listen>

Or to just be there

How do you handle your enemies?

I do not have enemies may be your initial response.

Fair enough

Let's tune it down – how do you handle or cope with the really difficult people who are part of everyone's life – your life, my life?

The nay-sayers, the wet-blankets, the negativists, the passive aggressives, the Sherman tanks or the bullies, the know it alls, the arrogant

The ones who have emotionally or sadly physically hurt us.

The people who cause you to twitch when you see or hear them.

How do you handle them?

Keeping in mind Jesus' words – **Blessed are the merciful for they will receive mercy.**

The world says, 'when people hurt you, hurt them back.

Tune them up!

I am just going to get even – but have you ever seen how getting even always seems to be getting even + a little bit extra?

The world says when people are nasty – gossip about them, talk behind their back, and destroy them!

Then we read pieces of scripture like Matthew 5:7

Or like that from the 12th chapter of Paul's letter to the Romans

⁷Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. ¹⁸If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. ¹⁹Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God;^[a] for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord."²⁰No, "if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals

on their heads.”²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. [Roms. 12:17-21]

What is often our first reaction? I am not Paul.

My hurt or situation is worse or different from that which Paul speaks about.

These people were jerks—they changed my whole life and not for the better.

Why show mercy to such people.

Why indeed?

Do we just say, “I can only show mercy, act merciful on certain days and in certain ways with certain people”

Scripture does not give God’s people the option of some of the people, some of the time.

Mercy, being merciful is to be practiced by God’s people with all people, all the time.

Yes, but how?

If you have never done so, then begin in earnest “leaning on the everlasting arms of God”

For the more we do this, the greater our understanding of the depth and breadth of God’s mercy, forgiveness, and grace toward each of us.

We have been forgiven so much—who are we not to show even a small level of mercy toward another—the parable of the Unmerciful or Unjust servant.

In some cases of hurt—particularly those involving sexual abuse or repressed memories about abuse—professionally trained individuals can and must compliment leaning on the everlasting arms of God

Crucial also is the present of supportive and merciful friends.

There is no 10 easy step programme to grow and cultivate a merciful attitude
Or to show mercy akin to Jesus' mercy.

It is really hard work,
Made more difficult, because the world in which you and I live does not encourage mercy.
Incidents and circumstances modelling the mercy of God are far too often, the exception, rather than the rule in the wider world

So,
Where does one begin?
How does one begin?
How is a merciful attitude sustained and grow?

One begins by declaring -ENOUGH
Enough of behavior and attitudes that are conditioned by payback and get even.

- ✓ Enough of being self-absorbed and self-centered.
- ✓ Enough of passing by on the other side when we see people in need

- ✓ Enough of saying—not my concern.
- ✓ Enough of “I’m too busy”

Fact: WE ARE ALL BUSY

When I was assistant minister at Knox Guelph Ontario, the ministers in the churches would get frequent notes from Sr. Bonaventure, Who was a no-nonsense nun at St. Joseph’s Hospital in Guelph.

Her notes would begin,

Dear Reverend/Sir, I know you are busy but so and so is currently a patient here at St. Joseph’s. I understand he/she is part of your congregation I know they would appreciate a visit.

And it was personally signed by Sr. Bonaventure, head, pastoral care

You did not want to get a second note or a phone call from Sr. Bonaventure.

And you made sure you left a business card when you visited

Above all, practicing mercy, means depending on Jesus for the whole of life That chorus I mentioned seconds ago, echoes in my mind

Leaning, leaning
Safe and secure from all shame.
Leaning, leaning,
Leaning on the Everlasting Arms.

Too simple,
Bordering on simplistic you say.

Really? **Yes, Really!**

It has never been that people have sought to follow
Jesus and found Him wanting.

It is more often that people have never tried and
been patient. AMEN