

## “Mercy”

Romans 11:1-2a, 29-32

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Romans 11:1-2a, 29-32

I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means! I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew. Do you not know what the scripture says of Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel? for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. Just as you were once disobedient to God but have now received mercy because of their disobedience, so they have now been disobedient in order that, by the mercy shown to you, they too may now receive mercy. For God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may be merciful to all.

Prayer.

The word “mercy” opens the heart.  
It comes from the Latin “*merces*”  
which means “the price is paid.”  
It is the compassionate behavior  
Or humanitarian assistance  
Demonstrated by one towards another.  
Compassion is the human emotion  
Triggered by the suffering of others  
That drives us to intervene  
And alleviate distress.<sup>1</sup>

When I think of Mercy  
My mind opens the folder  
In my long term memory  
I’ve come to know over the past five  
years  
Called the Sisters of Mercy.  
One of two  
Large religious orders of women  
In our region,  
It would be a disservice to call them  
“nuns.”

My friends and colleagues who are  
Sisters of Mercy  
Are some of the most compassionate,  
energetic,  
assertive  
disciples of Jesus I’ve ever known.  
Their call is to serve people who  
Suffer from poverty  
Sickness  
And lack of education  
With a special concern for women and  
children.  
Their life vow is to be mercy  
personified.  
Though I’m sure  
stories of knuckle smacking Sisters in  
school are true  
My experience has been much different:  
Housing and food when there is none,  
Education to lift you up,  
A free clinic for your health and  
wellness,  
And respite to rest and restore the soul.  
If only all of us could practice the mercy  
The Sisters have become,  
The world would be in a much better  
place.

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<sup>1</sup> With thanks to Wikipedia articles on mercy  
and compassion.

Being a professional liturgist  
 Charged with the sacramental  
 stewardship  
 Of the United Methodist Church,  
 When I think of mercy  
 My mind also turns to the words  
 Kyrie Eleison,  
 Greek, for “Lord have mercy.”  
 The Kyrie predates Christianity  
 But has been adapted into Christian  
 liturgies.  
 We are petitioned in the Psalms to ask  
 for mercy:  
*“Have mercy on me: and hear my  
 prayer.”*<sup>2</sup>  
 Isaiah begs our Lord:  
*“O Lord, have mercy on us:  
 for we have waited for thee:  
 be thou our arm in the morning,  
 and our salvation in the time of  
 trouble.”*<sup>3</sup>  
 In the Gospels  
 People seek Jesus for his mercy:  
 Blind men beg for mercy  
 as he comes through town.  
 A man suffering from leprosy  
 Begs for mercy as Jesus passes on the  
 road.  
 A woman begs for mercy  
 today in our Gospel lesson  
 on behalf of her devil possessed  
 daughter.<sup>4</sup>  
 The rich man looks up  
 and sees Lazarus in the arms of God  
 up in heaven  
 and he begs for mercy.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Psalm 4:2b

<sup>3</sup> Isaiah 33:2

<sup>4</sup> Matthew 9:27, 20:30, 15:22; Mark 10:47;  
 Luke 17:13

<sup>5</sup> Luke 16:24

In our despised, sin filled, disease  
 ridden state  
 The Kyrie forces us to follow the Biblical  
 tradition  
 To seek out Jesus  
 And to ask for his mercy.  
 I have a debt Lord,  
 Please pay my debt.  
 I am suffering Lord,  
 Please take away my suffering.  
 I hunger and thirst, O Lord,  
 Please give me something to eat and  
 drink.  
 The ache in my heart is unbearable,  
 dear God,  
 Please take it away.  
 My daughter, O Lord,  
 My son, O Lord,  
 Substitute my life, O Lord,  
 Please show me your mercy.

Life has a way of happening to us.  
 And sometimes, it isn't good.  
 We find ourselves put in the position  
 Where there is no good outcome:  
 I think of the soldier on a peace-  
 keeping mission.  
 When the gun is fired for whatever  
 reason  
 The only response is “Lord, have mercy.”  
 I think of the doctor  
 with a limited supply of life saving  
 medicine  
 Facing the needs of many.  
 The only response is, “Lord, have  
 mercy.”  
 Often our daily decisions are not quite  
 so monumental.  
 But finding ourselves trapped  
 By every possibility having a high risk of  
 a bad outcome  
 Drives everyone of us to our knees,  
 begging  
 “Lord, have mercy.”

If you have a conscience  
And an awareness of God's hand  
working in our world  
Then there is no other alternative  
Than to be dependent upon the mercy  
of God.

It is the human condition  
That creates the debt  
A merciful God pays  
On our behalf.

Paul reminds his church in Rome:  
The gifts and the calling of God are  
irrevocable.  
They were made before you were a  
twinkle in your parent's eyes.  
They are given to you to develop and  
use throughout your lifespan.  
And when the next generation comes,  
When we are nothing more than faded  
memories,  
Those same gifts and call will be  
extended to our offspring.  
There was no time limit to God's  
covenant.  
"I will be your God  
and you shall be my people."  
There is no time limit to Abraham's  
promise.  
"I will bless you,  
your family,  
and every generation that comes after  
you."  
We live in the same promise,  
According to God's word.  
When we've sinned  
And fallen short of the glory of God,  
When we've disappointed  
And even angered the one who created  
and blessed us,  
The solution to our debt  
Was paid  
by the blood of Jesus Christ.

When we've been  
Beat up and broken and bloodied by this  
world,  
By the blood of Christ,  
We can rest assured,  
According to God's mercy,  
We are forgiven  
And we are saved.

It is entirely impossible  
To separate out  
The sinfulness of Man,  
And the atonement of Christ,  
And to come to any other conclusion  
Than mercy.  
A core characteristic of our God is that  
God has a history of mercy,  
God continues to demonstrate mercy,  
And we have every expectation  
That God will continue to be in the  
business of mercy  
As long as there is time, and beyond.  
Just as God is in the business  
Of working mercy  
through the acts and means of Jesus  
Christ,  
So, too, are we called to reflect that  
same mercy  
With everyone who is indebted to us.  
So, too, are we called to reach out with  
the same compassion  
To everyone who is in need.  
So, too, are we to be instruments of  
God's mercy and peace.

Mercy is not a "Get Out of Jail Free"  
card.  
It is not a license to live without regard  
or conscience of God's laws  
knowing that God's mercy is going to  
save our sorry self.  
I'm aware that many conservative  
academics

Make the argument that mercy is  
inherently unjust,  
As if it is a license to kill.<sup>6</sup>  
What the secular world can never  
understand  
About our Christian life is the fact that  
Guilt isn't removed.  
The debt still has to be paid.  
In our tradition  
The debt is paid by the blood of Jesus  
Christ.  
To sin  
is to spill Christ's blood.  
To act with callous disregard to the  
suffering of others  
Is to spill Christ's blood.  
That's the price that's paid.

Disobedience results in God's mercy.  
But so does hunger, and homelessness,  
and poverty.  
Just as it is Christ's way to be in the  
business of extending mercy  
So too are we called to be merciful.  
Pay the debt of the one beat up and  
laying by the side of the road.  
Make the sacrifice of the fatted calf  
when that remorseful son returns home.  
It's OK,  
God will give you another calf tomorrow.  
God will replenish you sufficiently  
such that you'll be able to be merciful to  
the next  
sorrowful soul who passes your way.  
Be the mercy.  
Be the mercy of God.  
And you will become the mercy of God,  
extended to you.  
Amen.

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<sup>6</sup> See Sterling Harwood, "Is Mercy Inherently Unjust?" Crime and Punishment: Philosophic Exploration, 1996.