

# Extending Mercy

– Matthew 5:7 NLT –

## *Twenty-Third Sunday after Pentecost*

October 31, 2021

\*Invitation to Worship

Adapted from Max Lucado

***Do you have a hole in your heart?*** Perhaps the wound is old. A parent abused you. A teacher slighted you. A mate betrayed you. A business partner bailed out, leaving you a choice of bills or bankruptcy.

***And you are angry.*** Or perhaps the wound is fresh. The friend who owes you money just drove by in a new car. The boss who hired you with promises of promotions has forgotten how to pronounce your name. Your circle of friends escaped on a weekend getaway, and you weren't invited. The children you raised seem to have forgotten you exist.

***And you are hurt.*** Part of you is broken, and the other part is bitter. Part of you wants to cry, and part of you wants to fight. The tears you cry are hot because they come from your heart, and there is a fire burning in your heart. It's the fire of anger. It's blazing. It's consuming. Its flames leap up under a steaming pot of revenge.

***And you are left with a decision. "Do I put the fire out or heat it up? Do I get over it or get even? Do I release it or resent it? Do I let my hurts heal, or do I let hurt turn into hate?"***

That's a good definition of ***resentment: Resentment is when you let your hurt become hate.***

Resentment is when you allow what is eating you to eat you up. Resentment is when you poke, stoke,

feed, and fan the fire, stirring the flames and reliving the pain. Resentment is the deliberate decision to nurse the offense until it becomes a black, furry, growling grudge.

***God blesses those who are merciful, for they will be shown mercy.***

***How might this influence our worship?*** Some may not be here today because they are nursing a grudge, because they have allowed a hurt to become a hate. Sobering to think about.

On the other hand, someone might be here today having been set free from a resentment. This healing is most refreshing. Their heart is clear. They are free to worship the God who has blessed them with mercy, and having received mercy from God, they became a channel of mercy to another.

\*Hymn of Praise

*“Great Is Thy Faithfulness”*

UMH 140

\*Opening Prayer

*Lord, we confess that life hurts and even wounds us from time to time. We want to nurse those hurts and, in the process, we allow them to turn into grudges. Those grudges poison our hearts. Forgive us Lord. We cry out for your mercy in our woundedness. Set us free from resentments. Clear our hearts to worship you this morning. In the name of the One who poured out mercy on us at the Cross. Amen.*

Share How You Can Present Your Offering to God

Make your offering personal...through a donation or an act of service...bring to God an offering of praise and gratitude!

Sing the Doxology Together

*Praise God, from whom all blessings flow; praise him, all creatures here below; praise him above, ye heavenly host; praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.*

Prayers of Confession

By Moira Laidlaw

*When the busyness of our lives erodes the intentions of our hearts:*

*Merciful God, **forgive us.***

*When our personal agendas take precedence over reaching out to others:*

*Merciful God, **forgive us.***

*When we keep putting off being more active “doers of the word”:*

*Merciful God, **forgive us.***

*When we resist change, knowing that our acting and thinking are limited by our prejudice and ignorance:*

*Merciful God, **forgive us.***

*When we only half-listen to those who cry out to be fully heard:*

*Merciful God, **forgive us.***

Take a time of silence to contemplate these words and how they apply to us personally and as a community of faith.

Gracious and merciful God, forgive us for past faults and help us in the present and future to make ourselves more available to the hurting world that surrounds us—the world that begins on our doorsteps. Equip us to be patient and compassionate listeners, proclaiming the gospel not in overbearing ways but sensitively and lovingly. Strengthen us with the Holy Spirit to be fruitful and active witnesses to Jesus in all we do and say. Amen.

### The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

God's Word

Matthew 5:7

*The Word of God for the people of God...Thanks be to God!*

Message

**"Being Care-Full"**

Pastor Clark

\*Hymn of Faith

*"The Gift of Love"*

UMH 408

Blessing

***"Since God chose you to be the holy people he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience."***

*Colossians 3:12*



## ***“Being Care-Full”***

Matthew 5:7 (NLT) and (MSG)

*“God blesses those who are merciful, for they will be shown mercy.”*

*“You’re blessed when you care. At the moment of being ‘care-full,’ you find yourselves cared for.”*

### ***Introduction***

Interesting question to start with today: ***How did the birth of Jesus change the world?*** Historian Rodney Stark argues that there was one huge factor that helped capture the attention of the ancient world—Christianity's revolutionary emphasis on mercy. Stark writes: “In the midst of the squalor, misery, illness, and anonymity of ancient cities, Christianity provided an island of mercy and security. It started with Jesus. ***Jesus' birth unleashed a movement of mercy!***”

“In contrast, in the pagan world, and especially among the philosophers, mercy was regarded as a character defect and pity as a pathological emotion: because mercy involves providing ***unearned*** help or relief, it is contrary to justice .... [Thus] humans must learn “to curb the impulse [to show mercy]”; “the cry of the undeserving for mercy” must go “unanswered.” “[Showing mercy] was a defect of character unworthy of the wise and excusable only in those who have not yet grown up.”

This was the moral climate in which Christianity taught that ... a merciful God requires humans to be merciful.

If Jesus ran the world, instead of coldhearted indifference or retribution and revenge as the reflexive values ruling human interactions, Jesus would have the value and practice of mercy to shape all our relationships.

Why? Because that’s how God in His infinite mercy has responded to every human being who has ever lived! God’s mercy flows to us. We don’t deserve it. We don’t earn it. We don’t perform to win it. We cannot accumulate enough good deeds to merit it. Mercy is God’s very nature. Those humble enough to receive it, find it flowing into their lives. God just wants us to keep that flowing! And we can when we then become channels of that same mercy to others. It dramatically changes how humans relate to one another.

### ***Transition***

*“This morning we come to a turning point in these eight sayings of Jesus known as The Beatitudes. The first four Beatitudes have been very inward in their focus—examining and exposing our hearts toward God. They are personal and solitary in their focus. In these next four Beatitudes, we get a glimpse into Christ's heart for people. As we do, we're going to discover that our hearts need to be changed if we are to see people and the world the way Jesus does.”* —Bryan Wilkerson

If Jesus were to run the world, here is the centerpiece of how things would unfold in the lives of people everywhere! It runs so counter to the way the world operates. Just imagine if mercy would be the value and practice of marriages, parenting, churches, politics, international affairs...?

### ***Unexpected Kindness and the Divine Reversal***

What does it mean to be merciful? Mercy begins with sympathy—feeling another person's pain or need—but it doesn't stop at the feeling; it leads to action. Mercy involves an attempt to help the person in need, or to alleviate their pain.

Mercy is more than pity. When you pity someone, you feel sorry for them, you acknowledge their need or their pain, but you're not moved to action. In fact you're likely to look the other way or hurry past. Pity creates distance between yourself and the person in need. Mercy draws you closer.

Mercy is more than compassion, too. Compassion, like mercy, involves both feeling and action. But compassion is expected; it's the natural response to a person's need. Occasionally when there's a tragedy or crisis somewhere in the world, we take a special offering here at church to relieve the suffering of victims. The congregations always respond very generously. That's compassion; how can we not give something to alleviate suffering that is so evident?

Bryan Wilkerson reminds us that ***“Mercy is kindness or compassion where it's not expected, because the person showing mercy is under no obligation to show it, or because the person's suffering was somehow deserved.”*** When you forget to do your homework, and your teacher lets you turn it in the next day with no penalty, that's mercy. When a police officer catches you running a stop sign and decides to let you off with a warning, that's mercy. Mercy goes beyond what might be considered normal and natural.

*“Mercy is closely related to forgiveness, but is broader here than just the forgiveness of specific offenses; it is the generous attitude which is willing to see things from the other's viewpoint and is not quick to take offense or to gloat over others' shortcomings (the prime characteristic of love according to 1 Corinthians 13:4-7). Mercy sets aside society's assumption that it is honorable to demand revenge.*

*The passive verb here speaks primarily not of how other people will respond to the merciful person, but of how God will deal with those who live by His standards.”* --R.T. France

### ***Keeping the Mercy Channel Flowing***

*“God blesses those who are merciful, for they will be shown mercy.”*

This Beatitude calls us to keep the mercy channel flowing. As we have received it; so we must let it flow through us to others. We cannot get clogged up with our own self-orientation and refuse to share mercy with others. We see a sobering negative picture of this from Jesus' teaching in story form and found in Matthew 18:23-34. Here the mercy channel is stopped. It gets clogged up. The consequences are dark and foreboding.

### **Scene One** (Matthew 18:23-27)

A servant with a debt of astronomical proportions...millions of dollars perhaps even a billion dollars in our economy...cannot repay. He is brought to justice by the king and sentenced to be sold into slavery along with his entire family until the debt can be repaid.

The servant falls down to beg the king not to throw him into prison, to allow more time so he could repay the debt. The King goes one step further: instead of offering more time, he was filled with pity and compassion and, as a result, released the servant forgiving his enormous debt!

### **Scene Two** (Matthew 18:28-30)

When the servant left the king he immediately goes to a fellow servant who owed him a few thousand dollars. He grabs him forcefully and demands instant payment. His fellow worker cannot come up with this amount...which is a manageable debt in contrast to the first servant's astronomical indebtedness... and pleads for patience.

The servant refused to offer this patience and has the fellow servant thrown into prison until he can repay his debt.

### **Scene Three** (Matthew 18:31-34)

The king finds out about this astonishing turn of events and demands that the man be called back in to give an account of his actions. The king rages, *"You evil servant! I forgave you that tremendous debt because you pleaded with me. Shouldn't you have mercy on your fellow servant, just as I had mercy on you?"*

Then the angry king sends the man to prison to be tortured until he paid his entire debt.

I remember a compelling story from one of Max Lucado's first books that took place while his family were missionaries in Brazil. He had a dear friend by the name of Daniel.

Daniel is big. He used to make his living by lifting weights and teaching others to do the same. His scrapbook is colorful with ribbons and photos of him in his prime, striking the muscle-man pose and flexing the bulging arms. The only thing bigger than Daniel's biceps is his heart. Let me tell you about a time his heart became tender.

Daniel was living in the southern city of Porto Alegre. He worked at a gym and dreamed of owning his own. The bank agreed to finance the purchase if he could find someone to cosign the note. His brother agreed.

They filled out all the applications and awaited the approval. Everything went smoothly, and Daniel soon received a call from the bank telling him he could come and pick up the check. As soon as he got off work, he went to the bank.

When the loan officer saw Daniel, he looked surprised and asked Daniel why he had come. "To pick up the check," Daniel explained. "That's funny," responded the banker. "Your brother was in here earlier. He picked up the money and used it to retire the mortgage on his house."

Daniel was incensed. He never dreamed his own brother would trick him like that. He stormed over to his brother's house and pounded on the door. The brother answered the door with his daughter in his arms. He knew Daniel wouldn't hit him if he was holding a child.

He was right. Daniel didn't hit him. But he promised his brother that if he ever saw him again he would break his neck.

Daniel went home, his big heart bruised and ravaged by the trickery of his brother. He had no other choice but to go back to the gym and work to pay off the debt.

A few months later, Daniel met a young American missionary named Allen Dutton. Allen befriended Daniel and taught him about Jesus Christ. Daniel and his wife soon became Christians and devoted disciples.

But though Daniel had been forgiven so much, he still found it impossible to forgive his brother. The wound was deep. The pot of revenge still simmered. He didn't see his brother for two years. Daniel couldn't bring himself to look into the face of the one who had betrayed him. And his brother liked his own face too much to let Daniel see it.

But an encounter was inevitable. Both knew they would eventually run into each other. And neither knew what would happen then.

The encounter occurred one day on a busy avenue. Let Daniel tell you in his own words what happened:

*I saw him, but he didn't see me. I felt my fists clench and my face get hot. My initial impulse was to grab him around the throat and choke the life out of him. But as I looked into his face, my anger began to melt. For as I saw him, **I saw the image of my father.** I saw my father's eyes. I saw my father's look. I saw my father's expression. And as I saw my father in his face, my enemy once again became my brother.*

Daniel walked toward him. The brother stopped, turned, and started to run, but he was too slow. Daniel reached out and grabbed his shoulder. The brother winced, expecting the worst. But rather than have his throat squeezed by Daniel's hands, he found himself hugged by Daniel's big arms. And the two brothers stood in the middle of the river of people and wept.

Daniel's words are worth repeating: "**When I saw the image of my father in his face, my enemy became my brother.**"

That's doing the hard work of mercy and loving as Christ has loved us! That keeps mercy flowing!

## ***Being Care-Full***

Here's how you can put mercy to practice in your life. Here's how you can keep mercy flowing! Rick Warren offers seven ways to do so:

- ***Be patient with people's quirks.*** What person in your life has irritating quirks? How can you practice patience with that person this week? **Remember:** you have irritating quirks too!
- ***Help anyone around you who is hurting.*** See who around you is obviously hurting—and then look for a way you can help this week. If you can't find anybody, then you're not paying attention. Look closer! **Remember** God helped you when you were hurting!
- ***Give people a second chance.*** Who in your life needs a second chance? How can you show that person mercy and compassion this week?
- ***Do good to those who hurt you.*** Maybe you're suffering from an old wound that you have not been able to let go of. Choose to forgive and then turn it around for good. Who is that person in your life? Will you make a phone call or a visit this week? **Remember** this is what God has done for you!
- ***Be kind to those who offend you.*** Who offends you? Maybe it's a politician or a comedian that you can pray for. Maybe it's a Facebook friend who has different views and says some pretty offensive things. How can you be intentional about showing kindness to that person this week? **Remember:** this is what Jesus calls us to do in the Sermon on the Mount!
- ***Build bridges of love to the unpopular.*** What person first comes to mind when you think of an outcast? Who spends their lunch breaks eating alone or doesn't seem to have any friends at soccer games? What specific thing will you do this week to bridge the gap between you and that person with love? **Remember:** This is the kind of thing Jesus did everyday!
- ***Value relationships over rules.*** What unbeliever could you invite over for dinner in the next few weeks? Will you then step up and invite that person to church? This is your ministry of mercy. **Remember:** Jesus valued people over the rules that the religious leaders had crusted layer upon layer upon God's law.

## ***Conclusion***

Mercy begins with God. ***Mercy is ever-flowing from the heart of God.*** Receive these Scriptures about our God of mercy:

*"But you, O Lord, are a **God of compassion and mercy**, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love and faithfulness. Look down and have **mercy on me.**"* Psalm 86:15-16

*"But as soon as they were at peace, your people again committed evil in your sight, and once more you let their enemies conquer them. Yet whenever your people turned and cried to you again for help, you listened once more from heaven. In your **wonderful mercy**, you rescued them many times!"* Neh. 9:28

*“But in your **great mercy**, you did not destroy them completely or abandon them forever. What a gracious and merciful God you are!”* Nehemiah 9:31

*“**But God is so rich in mercy**, and he loved us so much, that even though we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead. (It is only by God’s grace that you have been saved!)”* Ephesians 1:4-5

***God’s mercy is ever flowing from His heart!***

But God wants that flow to keep springing up to eternal life. Jesus wants the mercy river to keep flowing!

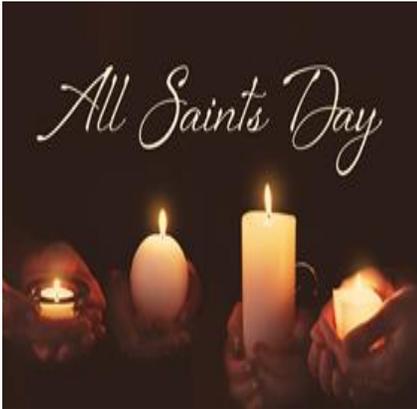
Have you received God’s great mercy?

Are you keeping the mercy channel flowing? Or has it become clogged up with sludge from your grudge?

If so, you need to see the face of your heavenly Father in the face of your enemy. May God have mercy upon us to unclog our stopped-up hearts. You need to remember the great mercy flowing into your heart and open the spickets to let it flow to others—even those who have hurt you!



- *Karol Kay Johnson, treatments upon the return of her brain cancer*
- *Onn Kantner, and family in Earl's passing*
- *Debbie Fields dealing with significant heart arrhythmia issues*
- *Jan Yaple is home but going to dialysis in Pickerington four days a week*
- *Norma Jacks daughter Cindy is gravely ill with Parkinson's disease*
- *Debbie Piermont is home from her aneurysm surgery and doing well*
- *Elizabeth Jones, healing for her radial nerve in her right arm*
- *Marsha Waibel, cancer has returned; surgery upcoming*
- *Dan Mathew, recovering from successful aneurysm surgery*
- *Jan Smith from Faith Church continuing treatments*
- *Sarah Cory and Guy Cory now both in Bickford Senior Living*
- *Praying for one another as Hope and Faith go their different ways*
- *Community Focus: Rebuilding a sense of community in our COVID era*
- *National Focus: Police and fire departments in the face of mounting danger*
- *World Focus: Getting the COVID vaccines to remote corners of the globe*



Our respective churches will celebrate **All Saint's Sunday November 7.** We will light a candle in remembrance of all who have passed since we last did this. If you have a family member or close friend you'd like to be listed along with the church members who have passed, please contact the Hope or Faith Church office asap to let us know.

**Special Thanks** Clark and Kim want to thank both Faith and Hope Churches for your most gracious gift for Pastor Appreciation presented last Sunday. We are grateful for your thoughtfulness and your continued prayers as we find our way to the future God has in store of each of our churches.

**Thanks to all who help make the Tailgate Party/Chili Cookoff** a huge success! Whether you helped in the set-up or take-down, providing the needed supplies, made chili, or baked cookies, etc. we are most appreciative! We will announce in more detail the Chili Cook-Off winner in our Sunday Service.

**Operation Christmas Child:** It is once again time to start collecting items for our part in this year's Operation Christmas Child. We have boxes for you to use as well as suggestions of the kinds of things to purchase that will be the most beneficial to the children.

**"Since God chose you to be the holy people he loves, you must clothe yourselves with *tenderhearted mercy*, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. ."**

*Colossians 3:12*

# **Advent Bible Study**

## ***“The Songs of Advent”***

*As familiar as we are with the songs of Christmas, there are four songs recorded in the Bible to celebrate the birth of Jesus that most of us aren't familiar with. The angels sang a song to the shepherds. Mary sang a song to God after she had time to get over the shocking news that she was going to be the mother of the Savior. Simeon also had a song. Then there's Zechariah's song. Zechariah was an elderly priest who sang after being visited by an angel.*

### **Session One *“Zechariah: A Song of Faith”***

*Even in silence, God is at work.*

Luke 1:67–79

### **Session Two *“Angels: A Song of Peace”***

*This is a peace that passes our understanding.*

Luke 2:13–14

### **Session Three *“Mary: A Song of Trust”***

*Like Mary, we can move from anxiety to adoration.*

Luke 1:46–55

### **Session Four *“Simeon: A Song of Hope”***

*The reward is worth the wait.*

Luke 2:29–32

***We will meet in person on Mondays starting November 29 and continue through December 20 and will meet from 7:00-8:00 PM at Faith UMC. Zoom participation possible with advance notice. There is a \$5 cost for participation.***