

Sermon
Proper 25
Mark 10:46-52

“Son of David, have mercy on me!”

I have said these words a great deal over the past few weeks. I’ve had to actually. Since Clergy Conference this has become my homework.

One thing I like taking advantage of every year at Clergy Conference is seeking the Rite of Reconciliation. Now don’t get concerned for your priest. It’s part of my personal rule of life, a spiritual purge that I try and practice around once a year or so. I also like to be reminded how it feels for the one confessing, the one who has something to cry out, a plea for help. It is an incredibly vulnerable feeling and a rite we so often forget that it is offered in our tradition.

To save you the suspense no I will not tell what we discussed in that sacristy at the Gray Center. I can’t. But I did tell you my assignment; my penance. I was asked to get something on my person, something to remind me that on my own I have very little self-control. Something to remind me that I need God to intervene; I need God’s mercy.

When I first came to St. Paul's, our director of children and youth, Claire gave me a small cross. I keep this cross in my pocket and every time I spiritually stuck, whenever a negative or selfish thought rolls through my mind I grab hold of the cross and pray "Son of God, have mercy on me."

It's a simple prayer, known in the Eastern Church as the Jesus prayer. It sums up the entire Gospel in one sentence. "Son of God, have mercy on me." "Son of God" remind us of the Christ being in the world, and "have mercy on us."

And it helps... a lot. The prayer is liberating. It redirects me from being self-centered into being God-centered. It helps free my perspective; to open my eyes and my heart to listen for compassion and hope. It helps me with the type of prayer that is most often the hardest for me, the kind that I don't talk about and what most of us usually save for Lent.

But it certainly can't hurt for any of us to say it a little more. "Son of God have mercy on us."

It is what we hear Bartimaeus say today to Jesus over and over again. This is a beggar, the lowest of the low. Someone who has lost their ability to see yet they know when the Christ walks by. And Bartimaeus sees in a way that nobody else can even in a way

that even the disciples cannot. Bartimaeus cries out, enough for mercy to happen. Enough for everyone to see the physical brokenness of the world.

And Bartimaeus knows what to cry out for what to pray for. The past few weeks we have heard of a rich man pray for his own eternal life, the disciples praying to be the greatest, and James and John pray for glory. It is lowly Bartimaeus, who prays for mercy. It is Bartimaeus who shows us what true discipleship looks like.

And through this prayer something happens. The crowds, who once told this person not to bother Jesus of Nazareth are now transformed. They are no longer speaking sternly to him. Instead they say Take heart! Cheer up, get up take courage, take comfort, on your feet, he is calling you. The people now have become vessels of mercy.

Today we too desperately cry out as Bartimaeus did as the incarnate one passed by. We too hope for mercy; to be transformed by witnessing love. We too pray the Jesus prayer whether we know it or not. We want to be god-centered and not centered on ourselves. We want God to show mercy in the world.

At the National Cathedral yesterday was a service in remembrance for Matthew Shepard; an American student at the University of Wyoming who was beaten,

tortured, and left to die near Laramie on the night of October 6, 1998 because of who he loved. Those who carried out these acts those years ago could not understand... would not love him as a child of God.

And then there was yesterday. Yesterday reminded us how desperately we need God's mercy. At the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh, at least eleven congregates were shot and killed. From Bishop of the Diocese Pittsburgh:

“Someone chose to hate, and chose to kill. And now we are faced with a choice as well— to do nothing, or to reject this hatred in the strongest possible words and actions.”

“Son of God, have mercy on us.” Have mercy on us from the evil that lives in us. Have mercy on the ways we turn away from the gift of your compassion and see only ourselves. Have mercy on when we live with anti-Semitism, racism and homophobia. Have mercy on the ways we discriminate and care for ourselves and our own kind over the other. Have mercy on us when we choose hate instead of love. “Son of God have mercy on your Church,” when we refuse to be Church; to ignore the cries of your children in this world.

Mercy. To show compassion and forgiveness toward someone when it is within one's power to punish or harm. That is the modern definition. Something that is so difficult to carry out. Where in the world do we go from here, when this sort of thing happens again and again? What does mercy look like when something like this happens?

Bartimaeus knew mercy when he saw it. God shows mercy if we can remember it. It happens in the Book of Genesis. After the flood Noah sends birds, one after the other, to find out whether there is any dry land or not, and one of them, a dove - and it is significant that it is a dove - brings back a small twig. It is a twig of an olive tree. The same root of the word for olive comes from the same root that means olive tree and the oil from it. The bird bringing back a twig returns with mercy; it conveys to Noah and to all with him in the ark the news that the wrath of God has ceased, that God is now offering a fresh opportunity for all. God will never do this again.

This is the God we know. This is the type of mercy God shows us. It's not about saving us from wrath. Mercy is about saving us for love; to show compassion and allow God to take care of the rest.

We pray to be rid of our inability to love. We pray to be rid of our unwillingness to show compassion. We pray to see and to accept God breaking into the world. We pray to be the oil that heals the small twig of hope in a sea of despair.

Our invitation is to be the vessels of God's mercy. We are to be the Church, to show forth with our lives what we profess with our lips. We are to hear the shouts of those who need us to say to them, "Take heart, get up, God is calling for you."

I encourage you to find something; something you can grab hold of. Something to remind us that we are not in control of ourselves, that we all need to cry out sometimes for change to happen. And we all are called to hear and respond to the cries of God's children.

We all have in us the capacity for evil. We also have in us the ability to love; to pray for what is most important in this life. "Son of God, have mercy on me, have mercy on us all of us" We pray that we might be transformed; able to see how the spirit breaks into the world and brings with it mercy. Mercy infinite.