

Worship Service: MERCY

Welcome: Welcome! It's so good to be together to celebrate faith and community today. My name is ____ and I'll be leading our worship time today. Our theme for today is **mercy**. The Bible has much to say about how to learn mercy, how to give mercy, and how to receive mercy.

Please pray with me as we open our time together.

Opening Prayer: Great and loving God, we ask that your Holy Spirit bless our time together and to refresh us with your presence. In the midst of a world full of trouble and strife, we thank you for watching over us, guiding us, and especially forgiving us. Enable us to enter your presence joyfully and reverently, and let us depart today with the assurance that our sins are forgiven. Fill us, O God, with the peace which passes understanding. Amen.

Opening Hymn: Doxology, p. 1

Statement of Faith: Let us affirm our statement of faith by reciting Psalm 23 together:

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

² He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.

³ He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

⁴ Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

⁵ Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

⁶ Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Hymns:

For the Beauty of the Earth, p. 2

Savior, Like a Shepherd Lead Us, p. 3

Amazing Grace, p. 4

First reading: Psalm 116:1-7

- ¹ I love the Lord, because he has heard
my voice and my pleas for mercy.
- ² Because he inclined his ear to me,
therefore I will call on him as long as I live.
- ³ The snares of death encompassed me;
the pangs of Sheol laid hold on me;
I suffered distress and anguish.
- ⁴ Then I called on the name of the Lord:
"O Lord, I pray, deliver my soul!"
- ⁵ Gracious is the Lord, and righteous;
our God is merciful.
- ⁶ The Lord preserves the simple;
when I was brought low, he saved me.
- ⁷ Return, O my soul, to your rest;
for the Lord has dealt bountifully with you.

This is the word of the Lord; thanks be to God.

Hymns:

Holy, Holy, Holy, p. 5

Jesus Loves Me, p. 6

Second reading (Gospels): Matthew 18:21-33

Then Peter came up and said to him, "Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?" *[Jewish law at the time dictated three times, so Peter is being generous here...]* ²² Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times. ²³ "Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. ²⁴ When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. *[A talent = considered to be worth about 20 years' labor: So this servant 200,000 YEARS OF WAGES.]* ²⁵ And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. ²⁶ So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' ²⁷ And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. ²⁸ But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, *[denarii = one day's wage. So this servant owes him 100 DAYS OF WAGES]* and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, 'Pay what you owe.' ²⁹ So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have

patience with me, and I will pay you.’³⁰ He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt.³¹ When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place.³² Then his master summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me.’³³ And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?’”

This is the word of the Lord; thanks be to God.

Hymns:

Softy and Tenderly, p. 7

Leaning on the Everlasting Arms, p. 8

Interactive Homily: Let’s think a little more about mercy.

- What is your definition of mercy?
 - The dictionary says wisdom is “compassion or forgiveness shown toward someone whom it is within one’s power to punish or harm.”
 - It’s also an event to be grateful for, especially because its occurrence prevents something unpleasant or provides relief from suffering: *that cloud cover on this hot day is such a mercy.*
- When have you received mercy in your life, from a parent or a friend? What did it feel like?
- Have you ever found it hard to have mercy on someone? What did that feel like?
- What’s the essence of the story that Jesus tells about the unforgiving servant? [reread parts of it] Why is the unforgiving servant so offensive?
 - He had his own impossible debt, but he wouldn’t forgive even a tiny debt!
 - Forgot his own need for mercy

[insert your own story, or use this one:] When I was very small, my mom had an intricate, one of a kind piece of artwork, a sort of vase, made in Costa Rica, her home, from ceramic. It was the Tree of Life, with a bowl shape in the middle. It had Adam and Eve, and leaves and fruit and other animals, and it was very beautiful. It sat on an end table underneath a light on the wall. One day when I was about 8 or 9, I was rushing for some reason and reached up to turn off the

light – and my elbow hit the sculpture and tipped it onto the tile floor, where it broke into a hundred pieces. I was horrified and collapsed on the floor crying, because I knew how much that piece meant to my mom. But she came over to me, and guess what she did? She put her arms around me and comforted me, saying, “it’s OK, it’s OK ... it’s just a thing.”

That was mercy! She had every right to scold me or spank me ... but she had mercy, and I have never forgotten it to this day.

- How does God have mercy on us? How have you seen or felt this in your own life? What is the result? How does it change you?
 - Gratitude, relief, renewal, freedom
 - Become more merciful to others

... Let’s take a moment to silently pray and reflect on the blessing of mercy.

(Silent Prayer) ... Lord, in your love and mercy, hear our prayers. Now let us say the Lord’s prayer together:

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, the power, and the glory forever, Amen.

Hymns:

This is My Father’s World, p. 9

It is Well with My Soul, p. 10

Standing on the Promises, p. 11

Third Reading: Quotes on Mercy

“I have always found that mercy bears richer fruits than strict justice.” –A. Lincoln

“The quality of mercy is not strain’d,
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
Upon the place beneath: it is twice blest;
It blesseth him that gives and him that takes:

'Tis mightiest in the mightiest: it becomes
The throned monarch better than his crown;
His sceptre shows the force of temporal power,
The attribute to awe and majesty,
Wherein doth sit the dread and fear of kings;
But mercy is above this sceptred sway;
It is enthroned in the hearts of kings,
It is an attribute to God himself;
And earthly power doth then show likest God's
When mercy seasons justice." –Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*

"The Mercy of Allah is an Ocean; our sins are a lump of clay clenched between the beak of a pigeon. The pigeon is perched on the branch of a tree at the edge of that ocean. It only has to open its beak." –Leila Aboulela

"All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth unto such as keep his covenant."
The original Hebrew word that has been translated "paths" means "well-worn roads" or "wheel tracks," such ruts as wagons make when they go down our green roads in wet weather and sink in up to the axles. God's ways are at times like heavy wagon tracks that cut deep into our souls, yet all of them are merciful." – Charles Spurgeon

From *The Lord of the Rings*, where the main character, Frodo, laments that his uncle didn't kill the villain: "What a pity that Bilbo did not stab that vile creature, when he had a chance!"
His friend, the wise wizard Gandalf, replies: "Pity? It was Pity that stayed his hand. Pity, and Mercy: not to strike without need. And he has been well rewarded, Frodo. Be sure that he took so little hurt from the evil, and escaped in the end, because he began his ownership of the Ring so. With Pity." –J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*

Hymns:

Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing, p. 12

Shall We Gather at the River, p. 13

Fourth Reading (Epistles): 1 Peter 2: 1-5, 9-10

So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander.² Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation—³ if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good. ...

⁹ [You] are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. ¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Hymns:

Blest Be the Tie that Binds, p. 14

I Need Thee Every Hour, p. 15

Closing Blessing: (Strike bell as you say the word "Lord")

The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine upon you, and be gracious unto you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and grant you peace. Amen.

Closing Hymn: Doxology, p. 23