

#38 10-11

Mercy for All

Genesis 45:1-15

Psalm 133

Matthew 15:(10-20), 21-28

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. ²God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew.

²⁹for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. ³⁰Just as you were once disobedient to God but have now received mercy because of their disobedience, ³¹so they have now been disobedient in order that, by the mercy shown to you, they too may now receive mercy. ³²For God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may be merciful to all.

This is going to be another of those sermons which draws from the various texts to highlight one point. And I'll tell you right off the bat what that point is! It is that to be a child of God means to envision God as boundless in mercy and to strive to be like that.

From our Gospel we have the wonderful "Holy Nag" - who proved to Jesus and all the witnesses that faith is something we have which causes us to be persistent. She knew the truth that Jesus could help her daughter - and her faith caused her to be persistent in her pursuit of Jesus. She was striving for grace for her daughter, and believed she was just as deserving as any other human being. And she was right.

In our Epistle we heard that God imprisoned ALL that he might be merciful to ALL. There is no limit to whom God is merciful . . . and our Old Testament reading shows an example of that. Joseph's brothers were going to leave him to die in the desert - until they discovered a way to make money off of him, and yet, he showed mercy and even kissed them!

Now, emotional scars that we have from our family can be some of the hardest ones to overcome. Because they are the ones who are supposed to know us the best - their wounds hurt the deepest because they seem to give power to our greatest darkest fears about ourselves. Strangers' pains we can often push aside because they don't know the real us - but family!? Those pains can stick deep for a long time. And Joseph provided for his brothers and kissed them and wept on them.

He could be filled with grace because he found his life through the mercy he received from God. His path was not looking back at the ills that were done unto him, but he continued to strive to make the most out of his life through his relationship with God. He was persistent in discovering God's truth - not just what he thought those around him might like to hear. That is why he could prophesy - because he spoke God's truth and did not focus on what he imagined the Pharaoh might want to hear. In fact he told his brothers that God made him a father to Pharaoh.

This is the truth - we have all been called to forgive our enemies - that is the path that Christians are called to follow.

And yet - how difficult it is for us! We all slip into the protective glove of our own comfortable zones and want to judge others. Even within our own Christian circles we get touchy and defensive about how we want to live our lives and others just seem to get in the way. How often have we complained bitterly about someone else? How often do we use the "should" mentality? "They should do this and that and should be this way not that!" We do it all the time and feel perfectly justified in doing so.

Personalities can clash and we can so easily allow ourselves to roll with it . . . but the reality is those irritants in our lives are just as worthy of God's grace as we are. And we have to be so much more careful than we actually are when we talk - forget talk - even when we think about others!

Jesus said, "Listen and understand: it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but it is what comes out of the mouth that defiles."

We all know how this goes: two worthy children of God meet. They were strangers to each other. Each were dedicated to serving God and praising and living for God and yet - when they came together they only saw the worst of the other. They search for companions to tell their side of the story to and are blind to the dark truth that the other sees in them. And this darkness is not evil - it may be not quite perfect - but it is not truly evil - it is just parts of the

child that they haven't recognized in themselves yet. And the battle lines are drawn and the wall goes up - and with each word that they share about the other they are making themselves smaller and moving further away from Grace. When they cannot see grace for others, they get pushed even further into the darkness of their own shame. Because in order to survive judging others, they have to get further away from the awareness of their own weaknesses.

"For God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may be merciful to all."

We all get caught up in visions of ourselves which are based on such a small part of God's earth. We see ourselves as members of a family - then maybe, members of our church, we might then be aware of our counties - our states - our nation - and then we stop there. And yet - God goes beyond all in this earth and deeper than we know - and offers the world to us, when God offers us other humans!

In principle - we are all ignorant of the world - but when we can trust in God and trust in God's fellow creations - our world explodes with amazing potential to love and live and discover the truth in all!

We may think that this is our church - and worry and wonder who may come into this building - will they fit in with us? Will they like what we are doing here? And yet the reality is - this is NOT our church. This doesn't even have to be called by any denominational title! This is God's home and everyone who comes in this door will find God here. No matter how hard we might try to put our personal touches here - this is the dwelling place of God, and we are all here to receive grace and to learn how to give grace under all circumstances.

God is here and we need to find a way to get beyond our own self images and to discover God.

While I was at the General Assembly I did attend a meeting on the transformation process, and it was very hopeful to me. It isn't a cookie cutter pattern for becoming another church. The process starts with 6 - 8 people praying and trusting that God is here, prayer works, and we are worthy enough to listen. There are books to help guide the process, but there are no answers on paper - it is all about faith! It is all about the unique spiritual development for each body of Christ.

Is there anyone out there who feels the desire to gather together regularly to pray and to do the spiritual work that is needed to help all those people out there who have not experienced the mercy of God to find it here? Please let me know! Pray about it - think seriously about it! Because we are recipients of Grace - we are a people with a great amount of love - we do feel the spirit of God here. Can we be as persistent for the healing other people's children as the Canaanite woman was for her own?

Are we envisioning God as boundless in mercy and living that in our own lives? We sure do try! So let's get together and see if we can transform this church into boundless grace - the body of Christ - the home of God for all humanity!
AMEN