



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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October 14, 2012

Pentecost 20

Sermon Text: [Matthew 9:9-13](#)

Pastor Eric Hansen

First Lesson: [Hosea 6:1-6](#)

Psalm of the Day: [Psalm 143](#)

Second Lesson: [Genesis 4:1-5](#)

Gospel Lesson: [Matthew 9:9-13](#)

Shades of Mercy: Bringing Clarity to Life

Brothers and sisters in Christ, when I say the word “mercy,” what comes to mind? For me when I say the word “mercy,” I think of the people who would need mercy. The people like you see on the commercials where it’s a child looking through a dumpster looking for their next meal. When I think of mercy, I think of some of those single parents I know of who are balancing a job, raising kids, taking care of a household. When I think of mercy, I think of that minority family that’s in the middle of an inner city, an urban area that is very violent and they’re still trying to bring their kids up in the correct true way. When I think of mercy, I think of those people who need it, and my heart goes out to them. It longs to reach into their situation and just fix it. I want to help those who are less fortunate. I want to help those who are willing to change. I want to help those who are going to appreciate it. That’s my view of mercy that I’ve found and I’ve taken on from my culture around me.

I think it’s probably rather familiar to you because that’s the common view of mercy. It’s helping less fortunate. It’s helping those who are willing to help themselves. It’s helping those who will appreciate it.

I have to tell you, it sounds okay on the surface, but actually there are some blemishes on this mercy that our world has. And it’s actually gotten me in trouble. There are times where I got to work in the inner city on a mission. I would go around and have Bible studies in people’s homes and share food with them if they needed that. There was one Thanksgiving when I went around and I gave a turkey to a woman and ended up getting cursed at for about 45 minutes. Something was wrong. I was trying in an honest heart to show love and mercy, but it wasn’t received as such.

So I think our view of mercy is a lot like what happens when you get done working or cutting lawn or working at the farm, whatever you’re doing, and you come home at night and hold your glasses up to the light and you see all the blotches and the garbage. You didn’t even know it was there because it was so close to your face. But it’s there. Other people can see it. I think that’s what has become of our view of mercy.

So let’s look at it. Let’s clean up these lenses a little bit. First of all, when our world view and maybe we ourselves say we want to help those who are less fortunate, we have to understand what we are really saying. We may in a sincere heart want to share the many blessings we have with those who are not as blessed or who maybe going through a hard time, that’s great. But at the same time, what do you suppose they see

that as? For that woman in the inner city, she saw that as me saying I was a better person and she was a lesser person. And in so doing, I misrepresented myself. I misrepresented my Savior. Does that happen with you? I think it could.

In reality we know [Psalm 51:5](#) tells us “Surely I was sinful from birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.” That means we are not greater people or lesser people. We are just people. We are on the same level playing field. We are all sinful from birth. We all have the same Savior. So instead of helping those who are less fortunate, maybe it’s a matter of just helping people.

Another problem with our world’s view of mercy is saying that we are willing to show mercy to those who are going to change, those who are going to try to fix it. I understand where that’s coming from because I know how frustrating it can be if you are trying to help somebody. You’re giving them money or food or something and they are not trying to improve their situation. Yet at the same time when you say mercy is for those who are willing to do something different, you are saying that mercy is earned. That’s not really mercy then, is it? We know that God’s mercy towards us reached out to us like [Romans 5:8](#) says, “While we were still sinful, he died for us.” Mercy has no set of standards you need to reach before you give it.

Finally, our world view of mercy that impacts our own lives as well says that we are willing to show mercy to those who are going to appreciate it, those who are going to give us a thank you. That maybe is the most dangerous view of mercy we could have because it portrays the real reason we might be doing it in the first place, not for that other person, to help them, but actually to get a pat on the back.

A couple chapters earlier in Matthew, [Matthew 6](#), Jesus says when you are showing mercy to someone, don’t do it for the fanfare. Don’t do it for the pat on the back or the nice thank you. Mercy is less about what you’re getting out of it and more about how you’re helping someone else. Our world’s view of mercy has a lot of blemishes. It needs to be cleaned up.

Thankfully it’s not all about how we give mercy perfectly but how our Savior got it perfect first. We see that for us today in [Matthew 9](#), how he did give mercy perfectly and how he called one of his disciples, Matthew.

Let’s check that out a little bit. *“As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector’s booth. ‘Follow me,’ he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him.”* ([Matthew 9:9](#).) There’s one phrase in there that’s pretty important for understanding the depth of our Savior’s mercy. That is that Matthew was sitting at a tax collector’s booth.

Understand a little bit about those tax collectors in the Jewish society...they were not liked. They were not loved. In fact, they were despised. The Jews did not like having the Romans over them let alone some of their own countrymen working for those Romans. The tax collectors didn’t help their situation anymore because they were

actually charging people more for their taxes than needed to be and taking that off the top. Those tax collectors were actually charging the upper class a little bit less and taking bribes from them and making up the tax difference by charging the middle class, the lower class. Tax collectors were considered scum, swine even. They were not allowed to come together in the synagogue. In fact, they weren't even allowed to stand on a Jewish committee for justice because they were considered liars, cheats. And Jesus says "Follow me." Do you get what mercy is being shown there? Scum of the earth. An awful reputation. Jesus says, "Follow me."

Matthew was excited, obviously. Luke's account tells us that he left everything and followed Jesus. Matthew, being a tax collector, most likely had the most to set aside when he followed Jesus. He was probably an affluent person. But he left it all and he celebrated. We hear what he does next in verse 10. *"While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and sinners came and ate with him and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, 'Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?'"* ([Matthew 9:10-11](#).) Matthew wants to celebrate this newfound blessing. He has Jesus over to his house. He has his fellow tax collectors come over. He has sinners that he knew from his past come over. He reclines with Jesus, and they eat. I find that amazing. Jesus, a great teacher, very learned. He had huge crowds following him, yet he chooses to go to the house of a tax collector knowing, as the Son of God, around the table the issues that each of those individuals had been faced with a day before, a week before, a month before, knowing their sins that were ever before them. They were cheats. They were greedy. They were selfish. Yet he sits shoulder to shoulder with them and he shares a meal. Talk about mercy.

I can't help but think about our own situations in that, how our Savior knows our hearts, knows some of the ways in which we've tried, and knows the ways that we failed. He knows how angry we got the other day. He knows the frustration we felt and how we shared it in the wrong way. He was there listening when we were sharing that gossipy information about our neighbor. Yet he comes to you and he says "Take, eat. Take, drink." Mercy, real mercy poured out for you.

That's something the Pharisees really didn't understand. Obviously they are sitting there and can't even talk to Jesus himself. They talk to his disciples and they say, "Look! Look at what your master, your teacher, your rabbi is doing! He's hanging out with sinners! Ugh!" They didn't understand it. They couldn't. Jesus points out why that is in the next couple of verses.

"On hearing this, Jesus said, 'It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.'" ([Matthew 9:12-13](#).) Jesus' quick, simple illustration pointed out for us. If you are feeling healthy and well, you don't feel the need to go to a doctor. When you are feeling spiritually healthy and well and doing good on your own, I can be a great person without any help from any God. You don't need a Savior. That's what the Pharisees were going through. That's what they thought. Jesus wasn't going to go

hang out with them and stroke their ego any longer, but he encouraged them to go into Scripture and figure out the truth.

They had spent a lot of time in the Scriptures, and all they found was a way to be more religious. All they found was how to look good on the outside and really never get to the heart of the matter. This is why they could not show mercy to this crowd that Jesus was hanging out with because they hadn't received mercy themselves.

Jesus points them to this verse that we read from Hosea that says "I desire mercy, not sacrifice." It was the people of Israel who were using God like a magic gumball machine in the sky. You put in a quarter and you get a sweet treat. I think maybe we can be guilty of doing the same thing sometimes. You put in a prayer, you expect something good and something to just work out and just be perfect.

Jesus is pointing them to this because he wants them to know it's not about sacrifice. It's not about what you're doing on the outside to look so religious. For us, that means it's not just about Sunday. It means sticking your head through a church door doesn't make you a Christian anymore than sticking your head in an oven makes you a muffin. It doesn't work that way. Yet at the same time, Christians go to church. Then they go out from church into their mission field where you can get to the heart of the matter.

The Pharisees did not get it because they had not received mercy, yet we get it. We've come together. We've confessed our sins before the Lord. We've been assured of his mercy. That means we are ready to go out and get to work, to follow Jesus' example of showing real mercy to people. We can do that by looking past some titles that might scare us away from talking to people. Jesus looked past the titles of tax collector and sinner. He interacted with these people. We can look past titles. We can look past those cultural barriers that are set up between us and maybe the other people on the other side of town. We can dig deep.

Notice that Jesus was walking along during his everyday routine and he interacted with this person, but he just didn't leave it there. He went to the guy's house. Think about how you can show mercy to someone, not just in a nice word or "I'll pray for you," but by going the extra step. Maybe taking them out to eat. Maybe taking some time to listen to them over a cup of coffee.

I'm sure there are a lot of people here who are great volunteers, who are willing to help out and help people when they're down. But I don't think all of us are. I think we can do better. I think there are moments where we can go out and impact at least one other person in our life. And wow, would that help the kingdom of God grow.

Mercy. Mercy. Looking past labels. Going the extra step. And finally going all in. Going all in. Loving that person so much that you're willing to listen and look past just a handout of some money or some food, but being part of their life. You can do this. Christ has shown you the greatest mercy. You walk away from this rail forgiven. That

changes things. With clean hands and a pure heart given to us by God, that means we can see the world through a different shade of mercy. We can keep our eyes open to those who truly need it.

So do that. Keep your eyes open. Keep your hands focused on God. Amen.