

“Lord, Have Mercy!”  
C Pentecost 20; Luke 18:9-14  
October 24, 2019; 10:00 am  
Congregational UCC, Buena Vista, CO  
Rev. Rebecca K. Poos

Luke 18:9-14 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

The Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector

<sup>9</sup>He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt: <sup>10</sup>“Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. <sup>11</sup>The Pharisee, standing by himself, was praying thus, ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. <sup>12</sup>I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income.’ <sup>13</sup>But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast and saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’ <sup>14</sup>I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other; for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted.”

### **I. LORD, HAVE MERCY!!**

Lord, looking around this world, things are a little crazy. (Or, a lot!) Have mercy!

People are being told they are not okay, just being who they are. Kids are being bullied by their peers, called names or worse. Harassed, just trying to go to school.

Friends of ours in Ontario are reeling and trying to figure out how to respond as Christian pastors, after a 14-year-old was stabbed to death outside his school—in front of his mother, who had come to pick him up when he called, complaining he was being bullied.

### ***Lord, have mercy!***

Other kids are being told by pastors, parents, community leaders and many others, that they are not beloved children of God— just the way they are—that they need to counter their God-giving identity and character— be more mainstream.

And, that all sinks in and adds up to a national health crisis, as suicides continue to increase exponentially! Over the past decade, suicide in ages 10-24 increased 56%, and became the second-most common cause of death for young people—second only to accidents.

### ***Lord, have mercy!***

And, not surprisingly, serious suicidal thoughts and attempts among gay, lesbian, trans and questioning youth is at least *four* times worse.

When someone’s intrinsic worth as a beloved child of God—*just the way they are and just the way they were made by Creator God*—is questioned, thwarted, put down, not supported—is it any wonder they believe there is no hope, and the world thinks they should go away?

Last week, as we wrestled together on Sunday with what we wrestle with in life, Marge Erickson shared that she is heartbroken about the children suffering at

the border, separated from their families. She wrestles with how to respond, as a compassionate Christian, to a situation far away and overwhelming.

Just this week, those numbers rose—or the reporting of the numbers did, anyway. The estimate of the number of children separated from parents is now topping 5500.

As Christians—as followers of the one who said, “Let the little children come to me, let me love and welcome them, do not hinder them—we *should* be wrestling with this travesty—and waking up at night praying, “*Lord, have mercy!*”

Children and youth are suffering in our world! Young folks are in need of God’s mercy, and ours as well.

In the grown-up world, in an almost comical spout, (comical if it weren’t so painfully common), a leading religious leader (male) told Beth Moore, a hugely popular and well-versed preacher and bible teacher, that she and other women, who have the audacity to think they can preach, to “Go Home!”

He then launched a diatribe about how “the church is caving in to women preachers.” This went over well, as you can imagine.

***Lord, have mercy!***

## **II. MERCY – MANY MEANINGS**

Mercy.

What does it mean? What is God’s mercy all about? When we are called to “be merciful, as your Father is merciful?”

*...give thanks to the LORD; for he is good; for his mercy endures for ever...*

The prayer is simultaneously a petition and a prayer of thanksgiving; an acknowledgment of what God has done, what God is doing, and what God will continue to do. It is refined in the Parable of The Publican (Luke 18:9–14), “God, have mercy on me, a sinner,” which shows more clearly its connection with the Jesus Prayer. Since the early centuries of Christianity, the Greek phrase, *Kýrie, eléison*,

God’s mercy, as it is expressed over and over in scriptures is all-encompassing. It cannot be exhausted. God offers protection, provision, guidance and constant presence. It’s so much more than “tea and sympathy.” Not just pity or clemency.

But, God doesn’t whitewash things or turn a blind eye to what is causing the problems—especially if they’re caused by the people. God calls out discrimination, not loving our neighbors, ourselves, or calling for the stranger and orphan in our midst.

God is generous in lavishing mercy and forgiveness upon the people (us!), but also expects us to do the same for others.

We need God’s mercy as much as we need to extend it. Communal! Not just individual sins and prayer concerns. Kyrie eleison reminds us to enlarge the scope of our prayer, too often narrow and selfish, to embrace the concerns of the whole church, community and world.

***KYRIE ELEISON—the choir sang it today.***

What are singing? All these many centuries?

We struggled a little with pronunciation, and feeling the rhythm in our bones, but once we understand what it means and get it under our spiritual belts, we can sing it from the heart—make it a prayer.

Look around you, can't you see?  
Times are troubled, people grieve.  
See the violence, feel the hardness;  
all my people, weep with me.

### **Kyrie eleison, Christe eleison, Kyrie eleison**

Walk among them, I'll go with you.  
Reach out to them with my hands.  
Suffer with me, and together  
we will serve them, help them stand.'

### **Kyrie eleison, Christe eleison, Kyrie eleison**

## **III. MORE THAN WE THOUGHT – Borg**

### **Mercy & Righteousness – Marcus Borg**

We hear these words a lot in church settings, in our prayers, scripture, etc. The problem, the most common meaning of these words in modern English is not the biblical context or intention.

Mercy/merciful—presuppose a situation of wrong-doing, where a person of power has the power to punish or not to punish.

Clemency. A disappointed parent giving mercy to a child – going easy on punishment, etc. It implies a situation of wrongdoing here someone is entitled to punish.

## **IV. COMPASSION**

Borg suggests we exchange the word "mercy" for the word "compassion": this word does not pre-suppose a situation of wrongdoing.

Com passion: To feel with. To feel the feelings of another. Not just an emotion, tho—a feeling. *Acting in accord with that feelings. Acts of compassion.*

Which word to use? Compassion or mercy? Depends on the context. If there's a situation where there is a broken agreement, wrong-doing, etc. then yes, use the word "mercy." But in many contexts, this word gives us the idea that there has been wrongdoing and that there is a punitive God who is ready to punish.

Compassion—feeling with, feeling the suffering of others, acting in accord with these feelings. In both Hebrew and Aramaic—associated with the word for womb, and the feelings a mother has for the children in the womb. God is a God of mercy/compassion –WOMB-LIKE: creative, nourishing, encompassing, love for children, willing your children's well-being, caring for them, willing to let them go, fierce dimension—compassion can become like a Mama Bear. Compassion is not a soft, wussy virtue.

We are called to this to others as well. Called to be compassionate of others.

“Be merciful, as God is merciful.” “Be compassionate as God is compassionate.” Some newer translations are using this. See how it broadens the meaning immensely.

**Key:** How we translate or understand this word matters—mercy for wrongdoing or caring alongside with action—carrying one another’s burden.

Don’t just feel sorry for someone. DO something about it—feel with. Com passion. Act alongside someone to help—however is needed.

## **V. WHAT DOES COMPASSION LOOK LIKE?**

### **A. Brazil: “A Kind Priest Brings Stray Dogs To Mass So They Can Find New Families”**

Father João Paulo Araujo Gomes who is the head of the parish of Santana in the city of Gravatá in Brazil does the kindest and most inspiring thing for stray dogs around his church. He invites forgotten dogs from the streets to become a part of his service to help them find loving homes. The doors of his church, as well as his big heart, will always be open for dogs. And who wouldn’t attend Mass if dogs were involved?

Dogs provide us with unconditional love, laughter, and precious memories and it’s nothing less than fair to pay them back. Whether you are a faithful believer in God or not, as long as you believe in kindness and compassion, we can slowly make the world a better place.

### **B. LYFT giving a LIFT out of Poverty**

**TAMPA (WFLA)** — Lyft is trying to play a role in lifting communities out of poverty with their new Jobs Access Program, offering free rides to and from job interviews.

Lyft says one of the strongest factors in the odds of escaping poverty is commuting time.

“For the unemployed, reliable transportation to a job interview or to the first few weeks of work can mean the difference between successful, long-term employment and lost opportunities,” Lyft says.

Debuting in 35 cities in the United States, the Job Access Program will provide the following:

- Rides to/from job training programs
- Rides to/from job interviews
- Rides to/from the first three weeks of employment

LYFT partnered with 10 organizations to make this new initiative possible.

“There are roughly two million people living with disabilities in the United States,” Ashley Helsing of the National Down Syndrome Society said. “Of those two million, nearly 30 percent, or 560,000 people, are unable to leave their home because of transportation barriers.”

### **C. UCC RIP Medical Debt**

For Chicagoans struggling to make ends meet, the daily act of checking the mail can be anxiety-inducing. Aside from birthday cards and holiday letters, there isn’t often much good news, but there never seems to be any shortage of bills or debt collection attempts.

Soon, when bright yellow envelopes appear in thousands of mailboxes around Cook County with the words “RIP Medical Debt” on each one, recipients might assume it’s yet another bill. In reality, those

envelopes contain the opposite, a potentially life-changing gift.

A network of area churches this summer banded together to take on the debt collection system that profits “on the backs of poor people”; to help restore bad credit marred by medical debt; and to inspire joy, said the organizers, the Rev. Otis Moss III and the Rev. Traci Blackmon.

As a result, Moss said they’ve wiped out more than \$5.3 million in medical debt, and they soon plan to send letters to nearly 6,000 Cook County residents with a no-strings-attached message: “May you have a beautiful, wonderful holiday. Your debt has been forgiven. Enjoy Thanksgiving.”

## **VI. MERCY IN THIS MOMENT! UP TO US!**

These are just a few of the stories I’ve heard this week! Stories of mercy—in all its myriad meanings and forms—being shown to God’s creation, creatures and all of us.

When we join in God’s compassion, we are working alongside *with* God for a different kind of world.  
Com-*passion*—joining in God’

What are your stories? Look around you—this week, week, and next week, and the week after! Celebrate! Shout to the rooftops:

**Lord, have mercy! Kyrie Eleison!**

God is showing us mercy all over the place, all the time! And inspiring *us* to show mercy, to walk with —  
com *passion* and com *panion*.

These times call for us to extend mercy and love—like Christ did and does every day—like never before! The

world *is* crazy. The times are a’ callin’! Lord, have mercy! Here we come!

Amen.