

## *There is Always Time for Mercy*

3<sup>rd</sup> Weekend after Pentecost – June 4/5, 2005

### Sermon Background Study

Matthew 9:9-13, 18-26 (NRSV)

<sup>9</sup>As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth; and he said to him, “Follow me.” And he got up and followed him.

<sup>10</sup>And as he sat at dinner in the house, many tax collectors and sinners came and were sitting with him and his disciples. <sup>11</sup>When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?” <sup>12</sup>But when he heard this, he said, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. <sup>13</sup>Go and learn what this means, ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners.”

[At a later time, Jesus is responding to some questions about fasting when he is interrupted.]

<sup>18</sup>While he was saying these things to them, suddenly a leader of the synagogue came in and knelt before him, saying, “My daughter has just died; but come and lay your hand on her, and she will live.”

<sup>19</sup>And Jesus got up and followed him, with his disciples. <sup>20</sup>Then suddenly a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years came up behind him and touched the fringe of his cloak, <sup>21</sup>for she said to herself, “If I only touch his cloak, I will be made well.” <sup>22</sup>Jesus turned, and seeing her he said, “Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well.” And instantly the woman was made well. <sup>23</sup>When Jesus came to the leader’s house and saw the flute players and the crowd making a commotion, <sup>24</sup>he said, “Go away; for the girl is not dead but sleeping.” And they laughed at him. <sup>25</sup>But when the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took her by the hand, and the girl got up. <sup>26</sup>And the report of this spread throughout that district.

*God is a God of mercy. We are to be a people of mercy. In the midst of unceasing confrontation and ever-demanding throngs, Jesus always made time for mercy. Do we?*

*Desiring mercy, not sacrifice*

When Christians are asked for their life-verse, the single verse that guides them most in their daily living, many respond not with a New Testament verse but with one from the Old Testament – Micah 6:8. “He has shown all you people what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God” (TNIV).

Mercy, not sacrifice. Many Christians have a pretty difficult time with large swaths of the Old Testament. Much of it seems so focused upon sacrifice, blood, warfare, temples, priests and the rest. Such things are strange and foreign to us and can prevent us from seeing that, then and now, God has always been most interested in the state of people’s hearts. In the book of Job, it is Job’s heart that is at issue. “Love your neighbor” is from Leviticus. David was capable of tragic sin, yet he was “a man after God’s own heart.”

It isn’t that the practice of sacrifice, giving to God what is God’s, was unimportant. After all, Jesus was the

#### Matthew’s Gospel

This is the third week in a row that the Scripture passage is taken from Matthew’s Gospel. It wasn’t planned this way; each preacher picked the passage he wanted. Perhaps it reveals something of the important place Matthew Gospel holds among Christians.

Matthew’s Gospel is very dependent on Mark’s for its basic structure. 90% of Mark’s Gospel is found in Matthew, though Matthew shapes the material for his own purposes, as in today’s abridgement of the stories about the local leader and the bleeding woman.

Matthew adds birth stories and resurrection stories to Mark’s telling the Gospel. He also adds five large blocks of Jesus’ teaching, the most well-known being the Sermon on the Mount in chapters 5-7.

The order of the New Testament books is not the same in all the ancient manuscripts. But in every one, Matthew is placed at the beginning. Matthew most clearly bridges the Old Testament to the New. Most likely written to encourage Jewish-Christians in their faith, Matthew’s Gospel goes to great lengths to explain that Jesus is the Jewish Messiah and the fulfillment of the Hebrew Scriptures. Thus, a carefully crafted genealogy of Jesus opens the Gospel. Fourteen generations from Abraham to David. Fourteen from David to the exile in Babylon. And fourteen generations for the exile to Jesus the Messiah.

sacrifice to end all sacrifice – it is the meaning of the lamb in our own Rose Window. Nonetheless, like the Pharisees who confronted Jesus, we mustn't lose sight of the truth that it is mercy and humility and justice and love that God desires from us. Hebrew *ahabat* is a root word for love. The TNIV translates it as “mercy” in Micah 6:8. The NRSV translates it as “kindness.” It conveys the concrete expression of our love for others. Mercy and kindness in all places and at all times. Kindness towards those we love and care for. Kindness towards those we don't. Jesus extended mercy to a tax-collector<sup>1</sup> when he called Matthew into the circle of Jesus' closest disciples, emphatically demonstrating that all are welcome into the family of God's people. All are worthy of kindness and mercy – *all* are to be loved.

*There is always time*

Interruptions are often unwelcome. In today's passage, Jesus is talking with some followers of John the Baptist when a local VIP charges into the room, humbles himself before Jesus, and asks that he come and bring the man's dead daughter back to life.<sup>2</sup> Jesus simply goes. There is always time for mercy.

As Jesus is passing by on his way to the VIP's daughter, a woman pushes her way through the crowd.

### Salvation

Christians often have too narrow and one-dimensional understanding of salvation. We tend to think that “being saved” has only to do with “getting to heaven.” In truth, if you think that “getting to heaven” is the only purpose of being a Christian then you are robbing yourself of the richness of our historic faith and denying large portions of Scripture.

In today's passage, the phrase “be made well” appears three times in the space of two verses. Both the hemorrhaging woman and Jesus are speaking to the wholeness of her salvation. Her medical problem is healed. Her relationship with God is affirmed. Her relationship with the entire community is restored. She is “saved” in every sense of the word.

Likewise, our own salvation is about the restoration of our entire selves, our whole being. It is about being restored to a right relationship with God when we come to genuine trust in Jesus as Lord (as in “I have been saved”). It is also about having the full image of God restored and renewed in each of us such that we fully live every day as the holy people of God. This is a process (as in “I am being saved”), not an event. It is about being *now* as we will be *then*, when Christ returns, we are all bodily resurrected, and all creation is transformed and renewed into Isaiah's “new heaven and earth” (Isaiah 65:17 & Revelation 21:1).

In a recent book on salvation, drawing upon the writings of John Wesley, Joel Green<sup>1</sup> put it this way: “(1) Salvation is a “way,” a journey, a life-path, and not only a point in time or a destination we seek; and (2) this way of salvation is the focus of the biblical message.”

<sup>1</sup>Salvation, Chalice Press, 2003.

The woman has struggled with bleeding for twelve years. Even worse, her bleeding has rendered her unclean. Like Matthew the tax collector, the woman is an outcast in her own village.

Because the woman was ritualistically unclean and untouchable, you can almost picture some people in the crowd struggling to avoid her touch as she surges toward Jesus. Coming up from behind, she touches Jesus' clothing, believing, as did her contemporaries, that Jesus' power would be carried even in his clothing. Though the woman trusted that by touching Jesus' clothing she would be healed, in what must have been a moment of overwhelming joy, she is healed instantly and feels the overwhelming power of that healing. Jesus senses the woman's touch, turns to her, and affirms that her faith has made her well.

There is more to Jesus' act of kindness than meets the eye. The woman's healing is more than physical. No longer will she be unclean. She will be taken back into the community. She will find wholeness and salvation. Her steadfast faith in the power of Jesus will enable her to begin rebuilding right relationships with her neighbors and loved ones.

Hardly missing a beat, Jesus arrives at the VIP's house where a crowd laughs at Jesus when he suggests the girl is sleeping, not dead. But I guess they stopped laughing when Jesus went into the house and restored life to the young girl.

Last week, we talked about being the light to the world, the salt that has not lost its seasoning. Today's stories show us what that salt is to taste like! We must never be too busy, too stressed, too self-absorbed, to extend kindness and mercy to others. Not because we seek a reward or hope that our kindness will be returned, but because this is what God's people do.

<sup>1</sup>We looked at the social status of tax collectors in ancient Israel two weeks ago. In a word, they were despised.

<sup>2</sup>Though Mark is the action-oriented Gospel with Jesus breathlessly going from one event to another, Matthew's telling of this story is very brief compared to Mark 5:21-43.

## Daily Bible Readings

*(more on mercy and sacrifice)*

Before reading each passage, take a few minutes to get a sense of the context. Your study bible should help. Jot down a few questions that come to mind from your reading of the passage.

<p><b>Day 1 Micah 6 God challenges Israel; What God requires; Cheating and violence will be punished</b></p>	<p><b>Day 2 James 2:1-13 Mercy triumphs over judgment</b></p>
<p><b>Day 3 Hebrews 10 Christ's sacrifice is once for all.</b></p>	<p><b>Day 4 Luke 6:17-49 Jesus' sermon on a level plain. See verse 36!</b></p>
<p><b>Day 5 Exodus 33:12-23 Moses interceded with God on behalf of the Israelites, appealing to God's mercy.</b></p>	<p><b>Weekly Prayer Concerns</b></p>

## Sermon Notes

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### **St. Andrew Summer Lecture Series – begins Monday, June 13**

Each summer, we offer a casual summer series. This year, we'll meet on the *second Monday* in June, July, and August. There is no sign-up required. Just come down to Piro Hall around 6:45 or so. We'll have refreshments and spend a little time getting to know one another. Scott Engle's lecture will start at 7 pm.

We'll wrap up no later than 8:30. Our topics will be:

June 13: "The Surprising Truth about Sin"

July 11: "Amazing Grace"

August 8: "Being Right, Wrong, and Righteous"

### **June Book Recommendation**

*What's So Amazing About Grace*, by Philip Yancey

Here it is in a nutshell: "There is nothing we can do to make God love us more. There is nothing we can do to make God love us less." Grace is one of those words that we throw around a lot, but I wonder how much we really understand it. Yancey writes, "Grace is our last best word . . . it contains the essence of the gospel as a drop of water can contain the sun." Like the other Yancey books I've recommended, I'm confident that you will both enjoy this book and get a lot out of it.

### Questions for Discussion and Reflection

You might begin by considering the word "mercy." What does the word convey to you? Do you usually think of it as a word dealing with matters of punishment? The Bible uses the word in a very broad sense, which we see in the various translations. To be merciful is to be kind and caring, to extend to others compassion and understanding that we hope would be extended to us. We live in a world that often seems so uncaring and unkind. Why is kindness and mercy so difficult for so many people? I recently saw the movie *Crash*. It is a movie about anger, people living so close to the edge of utter rage that they easily slide into violence and pain. Watching it, I couldn't escape the sense that these people so badly needed God. They so needed to extend a little grace and mercy to each other. Do we always make time for mercy?

As the page two textbox notes, today's stories of Jesus are about healing and wholeness – about saving and being saved. Reread the box. How does this square with your own understanding of salvation. What are some of the ways that the Bible speaks of salvation. You know more of them than you think you do. For example, salvation is about our redemption, a slave word that speaks to our liberation from bondage. Salvation is also about being declared innocent in God's law court. What other images of salvation come to mind? Do you prefer some of them more than others? Why?