

We have come to the fifth of our Lord’s Beatitudes.

**And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying,  
“BLESSED ARE THE MERCIFUL,  
FOR THEY SHALL OBTAIN MERCY.”**

There is an old Roman legend about a slave named Androcles who ran away from his master.

In his flight he took refuge in a cave. Alas. the cave was the den of a lion, and while Androcles slept, the lion returned!

Awaking at the sound, Androcles was terrified, but instead of attacking him, the lion limped about and moaned pathetically. He had a large thorn in his paw.

Moved with pity, Androcles approached the miserable lion and removed the thorn. Oh, the relief! The grateful lion became his friend, and even brought him food.

Later, soldiers captured Androcles, and his angry master sentenced him to die in the arena – thrown to hungry lions.

But when the awful moment came, the charging lion stopped in his tracks. It was the very lion he had befriended!

Instead of eating Androcles, it bounded around him like a great puppy, and they embraced while the crowd cheered for his release!

Androcles, you see, had been MERCIFUL.

He had shown the lion a great and unexpected kindness...and in the end, he “obtained mercy” instead of the death to which he had been sentenced.

That’s what MERCY is – an unexpected, undeserved kindness that changes everything and brings relief and joy.

Such a good and powerful thing is MERCY that it sets off a “chain reaction” – mercy begets more mercy!

So the story of Androcles and the lion shows, and so does our Lord promise.

Have you experienced mercy in your life? I have.

Years ago when I lived in Sequim I was stopped by the police.

“You were going 35 in a 25 zone,” the officer told me politely, then proceeded to write me a ticket.

I was guilty. I deserved it. I sat there in my car embarrassed, hoping that none of my parishioners would drive by and see me being cited.

Along came another police car! Now there were 2 sets of flashing red lights!  
I sank down even further in my seat.

Then came a voice: “Hi, Pastor Kasting.”

The newly-arrived officer knew me. He told the first officer to move along, that he would handle this. Then came the mercy – no ticket, just a warning.  
“You DO need to watch it,” he said with a smile.

I experience MERCY. Unexpected. Certainly undeserved! But OH, what a RELIEF!

Why did he do it?

Years earlier, I had shown him mercy – sat with him at a time he felt discouraged and depressed. I had listened, cared.  
Pulled a painful thorn out of his soul.

One mercy begat another mercy. That’s how it works, said Jesus.  
And when it happens, blessed are you!

Think a while on these words.

There are two parts to this lovely beatitude: the CALL and the PROMISE.

“BLESSED ARE THE MERCIFUL” is a call for us to show mercy to others – right now, right here in the midst of daily life.

That’s what a disciple of Jesus does – give people a break,  
cut them some slack  
to treat them, in truth, better than they deserve.

As a society, we are not much inclined to be MERCIFUL these days.  
We don’t want MERCY. We want JUSTICE!

Especially when it comes to how we handle criminals.

We vote for more jails, stiffer prison sentences,  
“three strikes and you’re out!”

Oddly enough, it’s the decent people (we religious people!) with our high standards who often have the hardest time being merciful.

In Jesus’ day, the Pharisees were the best people in Jewish society.  
Because they had such high standards, they were DEATH to folks who messed up.

“You have neglected MERCY!” Jesus accused them.

What about US?

How much MERCY do we dispense in daily interactions with others?

Start with the little things...

like when you get a rookie store clerk who can’t locate the code for broccoli,  
like when you wind up behind a driver who takes a long time to make a turn,  
like when the waitress gets your order wrong.

How do you respond?

I stood one night in a train station in a line of people that had to get off the train due to a derailment up ahead.

The ticket agent was doing his best to help find lodging and alternative travel,  
but it wasn’t good enough for the man ahead of us. He ranted and raved at the poor ticket agent.

Certainly our situation was unfortunate.

Amtrak could be faulted for the inconvenience.

But a little mercy that night would have gone a long way!

There are bigger matters, of course, where showing MERCY is both more difficult and more urgently necessary.

A spouse is unfaithful.

A child wrecks the family car.

A doctor’s blunder leads to painful complications.

Someone who has been a friend, or even a fellow church member, does you a painful wrong.

There has been sin, no doubt. Terrible hurt has followed. Punishment is deserved.

What will you do?

Will you do what comes naturally, what indeed you have a right to do – to be angry, to demand your rights, to level retribution?

Will there be any place for MERCY?

A word of explanation is in order.

To be MERCIFUL does not mean to close one's eyes to sin.  
Jesus did not do that!

Nor does it mean that wrongdoing should not be punished.  
Parents and teachers and police invite chaos if they do not take steps to deal with wrongdoing.

Yet there may still be mercy.

Mercy remembers that the offender is still a human being, even a brother or a sister.

When it rebukes, mercy is gentle, and seeks to build up.

Though it may have to punish, mercy also willingly forgives. It lets go of hurt and bitterness.

It finds a way to show unexpected love, to "go the extra mile."

**BLESSED ARE THE MERCIFUL.**

That's what Jesus said. It's what we are to give others.

But there's more to this beatitude.

The second part is the promise: "FOR THEY SHALL OBTAIN MERCY."

These words remind us that it is not just the neighbor, but we ourselves who are the sinners... **WE TOO STAND IN NEED OF MERCY!**

Or are we so busy counting up our injuries and clamoring for our rights that we have forgotten the truth about ourselves?

I heard a story about a rather unattractive woman who went in for a sitting with a photographer. When the pictures finally came back, she didn't like what she saw and got angry at the photographer.

“These pictures don’t do me justice,” she said hotly.

“Madam,” said the photographer, “You don’t need JUSTICE.  
You need MERCY!”

That’s us in front of the camera, and it doesn’t lie.

God’s word is the camera that shows us as we are, warts and all.

**“All have sinned and fallen short,”** says Romans 3.

If you insist that God must be tough and that you want JUSTICE done, look out!

**“With the judgment you pronounce you will be judged”**

That day – JUDGMENT DAY – is coming. Not just for the other fellow, but for you and me too.

It ought to be our prayer as that day approaches  
that what we get will not be JUSTICE, but MERCY!

On many a Sunday, it is, quite literally, our prayer at the start of worship:  
Kyrie, eleison – LORD, HAVE MERCY!

We don’t deserve it. But we may surely HOPE for it,  
not because of who we are, but because of who HE is.

He is the “Father of mercies” says 2 Corinthians 1.

He is “rich in mercy,” says Ephesians 2.

It was that mercy, says Titus 3, that prompted Him to send His son on that  
great rescue mission.

It was MERCY, sheer mercy, that forgave Zacchaeus’s debt,  
that pardoned the soldiers who crucified him,  
that promised the penitent thief a welcome in heaven.

Let me put it this way. God’s desire is to make a MERCY SANDWICH.

Mercy at the BEGINNING before the world began – the mercy that came FIRST  
and moved God to send His son.

The mercy at the END, when Judgment Day comes and we stand before Him.

God sandwiches us with His mercy. But now comes the question:

What comes in between that PAST mercy and that FUTURE mercy?

How will we respond in the present moment –  
with the brother or sister, the neighbor before us?

That is what this beatitude is all about.

The Lord of mercy – the one who invented mercy and brought it to us unexpectedly – now calls us to respond with a merciful life.

God is the Originator, the First Giver. We are the Recipients of a gift.

But now look! The Beatitude turns it around:

**BLESSED ARE THE MERCIFUL, FOR THEY SHALL OBTAIN MERCY.**  
As if we hold the final outcome in our hands...

Listen soberly, friend.

If we refuse His call, we will cancel His gift!

Do you remember the story of the Unmerciful Servant in Matthew 18?

He was forgiven an impossibly great debt. His master acted first, out of sheer mercy.

Now what does that servant do?

I am sorry to tell you the rest.

Out he goes and the first man he meets is one who owes him a paltry sum.

But this first man, so generously forgiven, forgets the gift he received  
and decides to be tough with his fellow – he shows **NO MERCY!**

The story ends dreadfully.

The king, angry at his ungrateful response, summons him back.

The debt, previously forgiven, is now reimposed. The mercy once provided is now voided.

For that unmerciful servant, there is no longer **MERCY**, but only **JUSTICE**.

It happened a few years ago in real life.

The newspaper carried a story of a policeman who, years before, had rescued a little Hispanic baby from a house fire – saved his life.

That boy grew up in the same neighborhood, and the policeman's joy turned to ashes as he watched that boy turn bad. Instead of treating his life as a gift, and using it with care, the boy ventured into a life of taking, and abusing.

Finally, in trouble with the law, the boy was wanted on an arrest warrant. Now that same policeman, who had once taken hold of the boy to rescue him grabbed that same boy, placed him in handcuffs, and took him to jail.

"It broke my heart," the policeman later said.

Don't let this happen to you! Don't break God's heart!

Today His mercy calls us, to hear His Word, kneel at the Table.

Today His great heart beats with compassion, reaches out to enfold us, forgive us.

Today His hand reaches to rescue us from the fire of a wicked world and hell itself.

Let His mercy beget in you a merciful response.

Let it move you to treat people the way He has treated you...WITH MERCY!

If that is how you let God go to work in you,

**BLESSED ARE YOU** today, and **BLESSED WILL YOU BE** tomorrow!

**BLESSED ARE THE MERCIFUL,  
FOR THEY SHALL OBTAIN MERCY!**