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Weekend of Sunday, February 24, 2019
7th Sunday after the Epiphany/Lectionary 7/Proper 7/Year C

Primary Text: Luke 6:27-38

Secondary Text: Genesis 45:3-11, 15

Sermon Title: “Called to a Life of Radical Mercy and Forgiveness”

Theme

Mercy. Mercy. Mercy. Joseph lives it in Egypt. Jesus preaches it in the gospel. The Spirit guides us into merciful lives with the power of forgiveness to reconcile what is fractured and divided. Such merciful living is the baptismal blessing of having put on Christ. It is the gift of the life-giving Spirit. It is a reflection of the glory of God revealed in the Christ.

Text

[Jesus said:] ²⁷“But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸ bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. ²⁹If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. ³⁰Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. ³¹Do to others as you would have them do to you.

³²“If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. ³³If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. ³⁴If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. ³⁵But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. ³⁶Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

³⁷“Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; ³⁸give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back.”

Sermon

A minister was pulled over for speeding. As the cop approached the driver's window, pad in hand, about to write the ticket, the minister said to him, "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy."

The cop handed the minister the ticket and said, "Go and sin no more."

Today, we will be talking about mercy and forgiveness in a sermon I have entitled, "*Called to a Life of Radical Mercy and Forgiveness.*"

Illustration of the posters here, side by side

I know better, but I am going begin with the presumption that you all know the full story that the First Reading comes from. And I make that presumption because the story of Joseph, the first son of Jacob and Rachel from the Old Testament book of Genesis has famously been made into a children's animated movie called the "*Joseph, King of Dreams,*" and the Broadway musical, "*Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat.*"

Like many stories in the Bible, it openly contains many cringe-worthy issues, like favoritism by parents, jealousy by siblings, and the selling of a sibling into slavery. And while, as I said, these issues are cringe-worthy, have you watched the news lately? People today are certainly capable of these and other unspeakable crimes and evil deeds – but I digress. The important feature of the story of Joseph today is mercy and forgiveness.

I have entitled this sermon, "*Called to a Life of Radical Mercy and Forgiveness*" and I think you would have to agree with me, that if you were in Joseph's sandals, it would be a radical act to give your brothers mercy and forgiveness after being sold into slavery, transported to foreign land, falsely accused of rape, and put in jail.

I don't know all of you and your personal stories well enough to know if any of you have ever been harmed to the degree that Joseph was. Personally, I can't even give you a trite example because nothing like this has ever happened to me. I can only imagine the hurt I would feel. And following that hurt, I imagine great anger and a desire for retribution. But that is not how the story of Joseph ends, does it?

Maybe the years, and the success that Joseph had achieved softened him. Or maybe, he was deeply spiritual, because he was able to see the hand of God active in his life in the bad times as well as in the good times. Indeed, at end of the story, Joseph said these words to his brothers who still feared he would seek retribution,

Genesis 50:20"Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people, as he is doing today."

Of course, it needs to be said that Joseph came to that conclusion at the end of the drama with his brothers, not in the midst of it.

I am just going to confess to you that often, when I am attacked in anyway, whether I deserve it or not, I tend to get defensive and react, often badly. I'm not proud of it. I'm just saying that has been my pattern. Maybe you can relate. I keep working on it, but I have a long way to go.

But I do feel, no I do know, that God revealed in Jesus Christ calls me and you to what I have entitled *a life of radical mercy and forgiveness*. And like Joseph, Jesus Christ taught it, and at the end of his life, lived it until the life-blood drained out of him.

Today's Gospel Reading is a continuation of last week's and I don't recall telling you last week that the context for it is the Sermon on the Plain. It comes from Luke Chapter 6, so it is pretty early in Jesus' public ministry, in fact, it was just a couple of paragraphs before that he selected the Twelve who would become his Disciples.

So it could be said that the Sermon on the Plain was the first time Jesus sat with his Disciples and disciplined them, meaning he taught them his way, and since he is God's Son, and therefore God himself, his way is God's way.

And in this particular passage, what Jesus taught was that his disciples will learn and live *a life of radical mercy and forgiveness*.

Specifically, he said,

- **²⁷Love your enemies,**
- **do good to those who hate you,**

- ²⁸ bless those who curse you,
- pray for those who abuse you.
- ²⁹ If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also;
- and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt.
- ³⁰ Give to everyone who begs from you;
- and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again.
- ³¹ Do to others as you would have them do to you.

Now, I'm just going to say what I think all of us are thinking; "Yea, that would be nice Jesus, but that is just not the way the world works." Am I right?

He went on with several more one-liners, all of which are equally preposterous. Why, if we did all that Jesus commanded of his Disciples in just this passage we would have nothing and would be considered weaklings and losers!

And yet that is just what Jesus commanded his Disciples to do, and that includes me and you.

Yes, Jesus calls us to *a life of radical mercy and forgiveness*, and should we choose to live it fully we will likely not win the admiration and respect of our friends, relatives, associates, and neighbors, but Jesus said our reward will be great, and we will be children of the Most High (:35b).

And while we might read that and understand it as a *quid-pro-quo*, in other words, *we do this and we get that in return*, a broader understanding of the Gospel would indicate that God never gives us what we deserve, and aren't we thankful for that.

There is a difference between *reason* and *reward*; the *reason* we need to commit to *a life of radical mercy and forgiveness* and the *reward* we get for committing to it, and I think it is an important difference worth bringing to your attention.

Our *reason* to commit to living a life of radical mercy and forgiveness is twofold: 1) because God in Christ has already committed himself to it on our behalf, and as I already said, aren't we thankful he did. We don't get what we deserve but God gives us radical mercy and forgiveness.

And 2) the second reason we should commit is because we call Jesus Christ, Lord of our lives, and so by virtue of our claim on him, we give him the authority to make that demand of us.

But the *reward*, that is a different thing all together. We cannot possibly achieve what Jesus demands of us, but thankfully, he did achieve it and so he acts with radical mercy and forgiveness with us. And as a result of the radical mercy and forgiveness of Jesus Christ, a reward awaits us. Not because of anything we have done, but because of everything he has done for us. And for that we owe him whatever he asks of us, knowing his radical mercy and forgiveness will make up for our shortcomings

Raisin' the Bar Challenge

And so my Raisin' the Bar Challenge for us this week is to reflect on these readings and see if you don't agree with me that God in Christ is indeed calling us to live lives of radical mercy and forgiveness as a response to the way he gives us radical mercy and forgiveness.

And should you commit to it, or renew your commitment to it, know that God has a great reward for us. We will be called children of the Most High. I can only imagine what that must mean.

Prayer

Most high God, what you ask of us today takes moment-by-moment vigilance, because the human sinfulness we carry in our being is so very prevalent. But we know that you equip those you call, and so we count on your Holy Spirit to strengthen us to answer the call to live a life of radical mercy and forgiveness. We pray all this in Jesus' name. Amen