



Saint John United Methodist Church
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Message for October 6, 2019
"Life Songs: Mercy"
Speaker: Pastor Tom Grieb
Scripture: Psalm 51:1-12

Mercy in Short Supply

We have all seen those signs that either advertently or inadvertently make us think, give us a good laugh, or both.

I like the sign on the shoe repair shop that read, *"We bring back dearly departed soles."* And then there's the one on the weight-loss salon that says, *"Let us help you win the losing game."*

How about this one? On the outside of a dry cleaner there's a sign that reads, *"Thirty-eight years on the same spot."*

I like this one the best of all. On a building just outside of Baltimore there's a sign that says, *"Trespassers will be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law, signed the Sisters of Mercy."* Mercy indeed!

Mercy is at a premium these. Some might say it's in short supply, and not just with the *"Sisters of Mercy."*

God's Vast Reservoir of Mercy

I like the story told of a poor woman from the slums of London who was invited to go with a group of people for a day at the ocean. The lady had not seen the ocean before, and when she saw it, she burst into tears.

Those with her thought it was odd that she would cry, particularly when such a lovely day had been provided for her.

"Why in the world are you crying?" they asked. Pointing to the ocean she answered, *"This is the only thing I have ever seen that there was enough of."*

Today we entertain the life of one who sought out God and his vast reservoir of mercy. When it came to mercy there was clearly *"enough,"* and not just for him, but for you and me.

Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your unfailing love;
according to your great compassion
blot out my transgressions.
2 Wash away all my iniquity
and cleanse me from my sin.

3 For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is always before me.
4 Against you, you only, have I sinned
and done what is evil in your sight;
so you are right in your verdict
and justified when you judge.
5 Surely I was sinful at birth,
sinful from the time my mother conceived me.
6 Yet you desired faithfulness even in the womb;
you taught me wisdom in that secret place.

7 Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean;
wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.
8 Let me hear joy and gladness;
let the bones you have crushed rejoice.
9 Hide your face from my sins
and blot out all my iniquity.

10 Create in me a pure heart, O God,
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.
11 Do not cast me from your presence
or take your Holy Spirit from me.
12 Restore to me the joy of your salvation
and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me. (Psalm 51:1-12)

David and Bathsheba

You have heard it said that *“what’s done in secret has a way of coming to light.”* That’s another way of saying that *“our sin has a way of catching up with us.”*

We see that sort of thing no more clearly than in the life of David and his dealings with Bathsheba.

You have probably heard the story before. You can find the account in II Samuel 11-12.

King David was supposed to be on the battlefield with his men, but chose to stay home instead. That night, he caught a glimpse of a beautiful woman named Bathsheba as she bathed on her roof.

David's lust for her drove him to commit adultery, the murder of one of his trusted soldiers, and the eventual cover-up of the entire affair.

And we figure that the sinfulness that has led to the recent #MeToo Movement is reserved only to this day and age. Nothing could be further from the truth. Such things have been going on for centuries.

Held Accountable

After arranging for the death of Bathsheba's husband, Uriah, David married Bathsheba and the two eventually had a child, all the while thinking he had escaped the consequences of his sin. Not so.

The prophet Nathan shows up, to hold David accountable. That was part of David's problem, he figured he wasn't accountable to anyone. In his mind he thought he was above such things.

A lack of accountability will get us every time.

Nathan told the tale of a rich man stealing a poor man's lamb, to which David was indignant. *"The man deserves to die,"* said David.

Nathan's response has rung through the ages, *"You're the man,"* and David realized that his transgressions had finally caught up with him.

- He was overwhelmed with guilt.
- He felt as though he had lost the Lord's favor.
- In the mix of all of this, the baby born to David and Bathsheba died and David anguished all the more.

David is proof positive that we all walk on *"feet of clay."* He is also testimony to the fact that the *"bigger they are the harder they fall."*

Deep Remorse

It is really kind of hard to consider the depth of David's remorse.

In a very real way, David was spiritually bankrupt. He had spent every bit of moral capital he had and found himself lower than low with supposedly nowhere to turn.

The good news for David, and for you and me, is that God doesn't leave us there. God stands to extend mercy. He seeks to lift us from the devastation of our sin and set us aright. That's the good news God longs to share with all who seek his forgiveness.

David came on bended knee. Better put, David laid himself prostrate before the Lord and poured out his heart essentially expressing how sorry he was.

David had lived with the guilt of what he had done for far too long, just like so many do.

David knew he had to get things right with God before he could ever begin to get things right with others.

“I’m Sorry”

One of my favorite movies of all time is Simon Birch. Simon is a physically challenged little boy with a wonderfully divine spirit.

During a baseball game one afternoon Simon hit a foul ball which struck his best friend’s mother in the temple and killed her. To make matters worse, the mom was played by Ashley Judd.

Simon was devastated. He headed out to a nearby boat dock to express how sorry he was.

What he expressed there came from the depths of his soul.

Sometimes only *“I’m sorry”* will do. I have always viewed that scene as expressing what all of us want to express, but often don’t.

There is nothing that quite expresses things like a guttural, *“I’m sorry.”* There is sweet release indeed.

The bridge between confronting our sin and restoring our relationship with God is contrite confession.

You hear me repeat it often, *“If we confess our sin, God is faithful and just and will forgive us of our sin and cleanse of all unrighteousness.”* (1 John 1:9)

Just look at the things David asks for:

- *“Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions.”*
- *“Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.”*
- *“Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.”*
- *“Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.”*
- *“Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.”*

The good news for today, particularly as we prepare to come around this table, is that there is nothing, absolutely nothing greater than the healing power of God's love in Jesus Christ. There is no sin, no sin that has not been dealt with on the cross. In Christ, there is always hope of a new day.

No matter how many memories need healing, no matter how long we have hobbled through life with the guilt of things past, no matter how much we think we are beyond recovery Jesus stands to redeem us from the very things that have a hold on us.

The stuff we are talking about today is a matter of healing and wholeness, of getting things together on the inside, so we might get things together with those on the outside.

That's the way forgiveness works. We experience the love and forgiveness of God through Jesus Christ and we want others to experience the same.

God's love and forgiveness enables us to do wonderful things. We not only find ourselves overcoming, but we are able to help others do the same.

I marveled this week at the power of forgiveness exhibited by Brandt Jean, brother of Botham Jean who was killed by off-duty police officer, Amber Guyger, as she mistook his apartment for hers.

Brandt's forgiveness at the close of the trial will go a long way toward his healing and hers. Brandt would have never been able to offer forgiveness if it were not for having been "*washed whiter than snow*" by the blood of the lamb, Jesus Christ.

Crushed Bones Rejoicing

When it comes to Psalm 51, I am quite taken by the entire passage, but particularly by the 8th verse where it says, "*Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice.*"

David, in the sorrow of his sin, had his legs knocked out from under him. As we said, a few minutes ago, he laid prostrate before the Lord morally and spiritually bankrupt.

It was only through the restorative power of God's forgiveness that he was able to go and resume being "*a man after God's own heart.*"

Beth Moore says this about all that, "*God sometimes uses circumstances and discipline to figuratively break our legs from continuing on the path of sin. Only the repentant know what it is like to dance with joy and gladness on broken legs.*"

So let's you and I dance in the joy of our forgiveness and may we praise the Lord all along.