

Sermon
Seventh Sunday after Epiphany
February 20, 2022

Genesis 45:3-11, 15

Luke 6:27-38

What do Joseph, right hand man to an ancient pharaoh, a middle aged woman crossing the street in Lower Gibsons and twelve and a half week old baby boy named Colin, newly baptised, have in common? Mercy, God's mercy. A mercy so radical we cannot fully comprehend and yet so every day; so ancient and yet brand new! Mercy; actions of love, kindness, forgiveness, compassion, abundance and generosity unconditionally given – even for, no, especially for, those who in our eyes don't deserve it, according to the rules and structures that every society and its structures of power devise. Mercy is a gift; no work to be done, no exchange required, no strings attached.

In the reading from Luke, mercy is the lesson in Jesus' Sermon on the Plain (Sermon on the Mount in Matthew), it is the 'how to' of mercy, but it is in Genesis where we find the story of Joseph that is the lived and told story of mercy, God's mercy and, in turn, Joseph's mercy.

Joseph, the little brother, is dumped in a pit by his brothers, rescued by merchants on their way to Egypt, and then sold into slavery. But the bright young man that he is, does well for himself, has responsibilities and respect. Still he gets into trouble and out again, into prison and out. He recognizes God is with him in his life journey with its ups and downs and twists. One day he finds his brothers

standing in front of him and they don't recognize their grown up, handsome, confident little brother, that audacious skinny kid they abandoned so long ago, now in a position of significant power in this foreign land of Egypt. Can you imagine Joseph's shock and surprise as well as the possibilities that would bring up? He could have thrown his brothers into jail, could have just ignored them, could have gloated and bullied but he didn't. Instead he welcomed them, asked about his father, he wept over them in welcome and love! But as God showed great mercy to him over the course of years, he now shows mercy in spades to his brothers. Recognizing ongoing drought and famine ahead, he says to his brothers, "Come stay here, all of you and your households and herds and I will make sure you will have everything you need. You will not live in poverty." In this ancient story of Joseph reconciliation, abundance, and mercy overcome separation, deprivation, and fear.

A couple weeks ago, I grabbed my to do list, stuffed it in my purse, headed to the car to run to the library and a couple shops in lower Gibsons. I was driving down Gower Street and there were quite a few cars parked in that first block and anyway because I also was going to the library I could park a block further down and walk up the hill to the library first. I was driving fairly slowly past Mike's Place when a woman came out from between the parked cars to cross to the other side. She looked about my age; she was wearing high vis gear and appeared as though she might have been a security guard somewhere. I came to a stop mid block and she continued to cross the street. She didn't acknowledge my stopping for her, you know, that little wave of "thank you" instead she looked at me angrily, almost aggressively. I instantly had some not so nice thoughts about her

and that surge of energy that comes with the spark of irritation and anger. I proceeded down the street and parked, grabbed my books and opened the car door, already letting the incident pass. Then I heard angry shouts, foul language and glanced back to where I had come from to see the same woman I had just encountered yelling and shaking her fists at cars or people or both. In that same instant I knew, “oh no, she is not well! I hope that someone is there for her. Forgive me!” I shouldn’t have judged so quickly. While not a story of biblical proportion, she is the one Jesus would have calmed and accepted without judgment, would have touched and healed. That is mercy. While the woman was not my enemy I pushed her away in my mind. She didn’t fit into how I thought she should behave. In mercy there is no “tit for tat” or reciprocity. Jesus said, “Do good, expect nothing in return...” not even a little wave of thanks.

Baby Colin, loved by his parents, his extended family and community of friends is enveloped in God’s mercy. Right at the very beginning of the Baptismal liturgy Pastor Hergy read; “God who is rich in mercy and love....” Mercy; no work, no exchanges, no strings attached. God’s mercy is dependable, available, and abundant. As Colin grows up he will learn the lessons of mercy; loving, doing good, forgiving, being kind and generous. And it will be hard, many times, really hard, for him just like for every one of us and he will stumble, just like every one of us. And in those times it will be the mercy of God, the mercy of his parents, family and friends that will embrace and hold him. The mercy of God, for every one of us. Mercy is rooted in love, especially love for others.

“Be merciful, just as God is merciful.” It’s the verse that summarizes everything in Jesus’ Sermon on the Plain. Loving our enemies, doing good to those who would

really rather deal with anyone else than me or you. To give to those who need so much and maybe, according to our rules, don't deserve it, but we give anyway because God gives anyway. Joseph and Jesus were deeply familiar with brokenness; personal, social, political and economic brokenness, just as we see it today. Yet mercy was their response.

How do we live into God's mercy? That mercy Jesus talks about, teaches and does? Sometimes it's leaning into and learning of the mercy of God from the Biblical stories, the Josephs of the world who seem so much larger than life. Sometimes it's just about looking back down the street and praying for someone lost, unwell and suffering and at the same time asking for forgiveness. Sometimes it's the mercy found in clear eyes and pure smile of the child, for as Charles Dickens said, "It is no small thing, when they, who are so fresh from God, love us."

O God, have mercy on us.

Amen