

The Be-Attitudes: 5. Merciful

Matthew 5.1-12 [New Century Version, and Wilson's Native American Paraphrase]

Mason United Methodist Church

16 May 2010

If emailed stories were copyrighted they would have lost their original authorship many, many sendings ago. Such would undoubtedly be the case with the story I received on my computer a few weeks ago.

Grandma is quite elderly but she still drives her own car. She writes in a letter:

The other day I went up to our local Christian book store and saw a "Honk if you love Jesus" bumper sticker.

Feeling quite elated that day after having come from a thrilling choir performance and a particularly meaningful church service, I bought the sticker and immediately placed it on my bumper. And I am *so* glad I did.

I was stopped at a red light at a busy intersection and lost in thought about the wonderful experiences of the morning and didn't notice that the light had changed.

It's a good thing someone else loves Jesus because if he hadn't honked I would never have noticed. I found out at that moment there were lots of people who love Jesus!

While I was sitting there reveling in all that love, the man behind me started honking even more often, then leaned out of his window and yelled, "For the love of God! Go! Go! Go! Jesus Christ, go!" What an exuberant cheerleader he was for Jesus!

It seemed that everyone was honking! So I just leaned out my window and started waving and smiling to all those loving people. I even honked my own horn a few times to share in all that love! There must have been a man from Florida behind me because I heard him yelling something about a sunny beach.

Then I saw another man waving in a different kind of way with only one finger up in the air. My teenage grandson was in the car with me and I asked him what that meant. He said, "It's probably a foreign good luck sign or something." Well, I haven't known many visitors from other countries, so I leaned out the window and gave him the good luck sign, too. My grandson burst out laughing. Why, even he was enjoying this religious experience!

A couple of people were so caught up in the joy of the moment that they got out of their cars and started walking toward my car. I'll bet they wanted to pray, or to ask what church I attended; but then I noticed the light was changing. So grinning, I waved the good luck sign to all my brothers and sisters and drove on through the

intersection. I noticed that I was the only car that got through the light before it changed, and felt kind of sad that I had to leave them after all the love we had shared; so I slowed down and gave them all the good luck sign one last time as I drove away.

I can hardly wait to drive some more and meet some people who are excited enough to honk because they love Jesus!

If there was ever a good example of a time that *mercy* was in order, it would have been for that dear, fictitious grandmother.

What would it be like to be able to get inside the mind and body of another person and be able to see, hear and feel their experiences? Impossible? Yes; but that is exactly the meaning of the Greek and Hebrew language to describe the English word *mercy*.

William Barclay writes that...

...the Greek word for merciful is *eleēmōn* [ele-ee'-moan]. But the Greek goes back to an original Hebrew and Aramaic. The Hebrew word for mercy is *chesedh* [che'-sed]. It does not mean only to sympathise with a person in the popular sense of the term; it does not mean to feel sorry for someone in trouble. *Chesedh*, mercy, means the ability to get right inside the other person's skin until we can see things with his eyes, think things with his mind, and feel things with his feelings. Clearly this is much more than an emotional wave of pity; clearly this demands a quite deliberate effort of the mind and of the will. It denotes a sympathy which is not given, as it were, from outside, but which comes from a deliberate identification with the other person, until we see things as he sees them, and feel things as he feels them. This is *sympathy* in the literal sense of the word. *Sympathy* is derived from two Greek words, *sūn* which means together with, and *paschein* which means *to experience* or *to suffer*. *Sympathy* means *experiencing things together with the other person*, literally going through what he is going through.

This is precisely what so many people do not even try to do. Most people are so concerned with their own feelings that they are not much concerned with the feelings of anyone else. When they are sorry for someone else, it is, as it were, from the outside; they do not make the deliberate effort to get inside the other person's mind and heart, until they see and feel things as he sees and feels them.

If we did make this deliberate attempt [impossible as it physically is], and if we did achieve this identification with the other person, it would obviously make a very great difference to life. [William Barclay. The Daily Study Bible, Volume 1. Edinburgh, Scotland, The Saint Andrew Press, 1956, Page 98.]

Barclay further says that thinking and acting in this way would, "...save us from being *kind* in the wrong way; would make *forgiveness* and *tolerance* ever so much easier; and would be *demonstrating what God did in Jesus Christ*." [Ibid, pp. 99-100, italics mine]

It is very seldom indeed that we do even our finest actions from absolutely unmixed motives. If we give generously and liberally to some good cause, it may well be that there lingers in the depths of our hearts some contentment in basking in the sunshine of our own self-approval, some pleasure in the praise and thanks and credit which we will receive. If we do some fine thing, which demands some sacrifice from us, it may well be that we are not altogether free from the feeling that [people] will see something heroic in us and that we may regard ourselves as a martyr. Even a preacher at [her or] his most sincere is not altogether free from the danger of self-satisfaction in having preached a good sermon. Was it not John Bunyan who was once told by someone that he had preached well that day, and who answered sadly, "The devil already told me that as I was coming down the pulpit steps." [Ibid, page 101-102, bracketed editions mine]

Altruistic mercy is a beautiful thing to experience in both receiving and giving. It is at the very core of our Christian beliefs and actions.

Jesus taught it again and again during his three years with his disciples and in his teaching and living before the people to whom he ministered. He demonstrated mercy in what he did and said at every point in his life, work and ministry.

Queen Victoria was a close friend of Principal and Mrs. [John] Tulloch of Saint Andrews [University]. Prince Albert died and Victoria was left alone. Just at the same time Principal Tulloch died and Mrs. Tulloch was left alone. All unannounced Queen Victoria came to call on Mrs. Tulloch when she was resting on a couch in her room. When the Queen was announced Mrs. Tulloch struggled to rise quickly from the couch and to curtsy. The Queen stepped forward: "My dear," she said, "don't rise. I am not coming to you to-day as a queen to a subject, but as one woman who has lost her husband to another." [Ibid, page 100, bracketed information added]

The beatitude teaching of Jesus is clear: to *receive* mercy one must be able to *give* mercy. And he also taught the disciples and us to pray, "Forgive us our trespasses [debts, sins] *as we forgive those* who trespass against us."

And Jesus demonstrated this under the most difficult circumstances.

When dying while nailed to a cross, he looked out at the people who had hung him there and to those who continued to jeer, and he spoke the words, "Father, forgive them. They don't know what they're doing." [Luke 23.34]

Amen.