

## Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

July 11, 2010

**"Mercy, Mercy, Mercy!"**

**Saint Luke 10:25-37**

*"The one who showed him mercy..."* St. Luke 10:37

"You know sometimes we're not prepared for adversity. When it happens sometimes we're caught short. We don't know exactly how to handle it when it comes up. Sometimes we don't know just what to do when adversity takes over. But there is advice for all of us. Advice that tells us what to do when we have this problem with adversity. It's called: 'Mercy, Mercy, Mercy.'"

[Quote from Cannonball Adderley introducing the Joe Zawinul tune: 'Mercy, Mercy, Mercy' at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pRrFWp4DUho>]

The priest was not prepared for adversity as he traveled the road to Jericho. A fellow Hebrew, one of his own was on the side of the road – wounded and alone. He did not know exactly how to handle such diversity when it came up. Did he have obligations ahead – obligations to people waiting for him? Maybe a sick parishioner or a wanton beggar! Sometimes we just don't know what to do when adversity takes over and someone is fallen at our feet.

But then Christ gives some advice – advice for us all – advice that tells us what to do when we have this problem with adversity. It's called: 'Mercy, Mercy, Mercy!'

The Levite, a member of the priestly tribe is faced with adversity on the road to Jericho. A wounded and dying comrade on the side of the road – the Levite, too, may have had some pressing obligations – family members in need, synagogue duties. Shall he chance losing his purity by touching such a man? And then be unable to perform the duties to which he has been called. The Levite is faced with a dilemma – throw out his duties or help this man.

You know sometimes we are not prepared for adversity. We don't know exactly how to handle it. Sometimes we don't know just what to do when adversity shows up. But then Christ gives some advice – advice for us all: 'Mercy, Mercy, Mercy!'

A Samaritan of mixed race, hated by his Jewish comrades – considered impure and part of a bastard people travels the same road to Jericho. A wounded Jewish man is in the ditch. Now this mixed race Samaritan is on the horns of a dilemma. A person who hates his race, a person who considers him inferior and impure needs his help. This other – this enemy is wounded in

the ditch. However, the Samaritan knows what to do when faced with adversity – when challenged with a situation of adversity. With the tune ringing in his ears he shows ‘Mercy, Mercy, Mercy!’

**Mercy** is defined by Webster's Dictionary as:

- 1) compassion or forbearance shown to an offender or subject; clemency or kindness extended to someone instead of strictness or severity;
- 2) a blessing regarded as an act of divine favor or compassion;
- 3) relief of distress; compassion shown to victims of misfortune.

In Hebrew it is related to the word *racham* – which has to do with compassion for the child in the womb: in other words a mother's love for her child. Another Hebrew term is *chanan* – which means to bend or stoop in kindness or to show favor. The Hebrew *chesed* is also translated as ‘mercy’ and means lovingkindness.

What all three of these ways of expressing ‘mercy’ have in common is ‘connection.’ There is a connection to the child, a relationship to the one given favor, a bond to which one shows lovingkindness.

Too often this parable is reduced to a cliché or a morality play with the priest and Levite painted as only bad and the Good Samaritan as only good. When we reduce the Parable of the Good Samaritan to a cliché or morality play that we miss the point – the point – ‘Mercy!’

In May for my ‘continuing education’ I took a two day course ‘The Art of Mindful Facilitation’ sponsored through the YWCA which took place at Giovanni's on Bell School. The leader was Lee Mun Wah – an Asian Buddhist who has been teaching people how to relate to other races and how to facilitate cross cultural and cross racial conversations.

The participants included quite a diverse group: African Americans, Caucasians, Asians, Men, Women, Gay, and Straight – priests, pastors, business leaders, lawyers, secretaries. As well as a variety of religions.

Lee did not lecture so much as taught us how to listen and converse through our diversity. He taught us how to relate to persons who are ‘other’ or so different from me in culture, race, or religion.

Lee Mun Wah had facilitated many groups throughout his career. He spoke that his worst nightmare was to have a participant who simply took over the entire seminar and would cut off all dialog by his posturing.

Lee's worst nightmare happened with a group of prestigious executive businessmen who had asked him to train them in diversity since they were expanding and hiring a more diverse group of employees.

When Lee Mun Wah arrived with his African-American woman assistant, he discovered that the room was not very conducive for constructive dialog. It was narrow with all the seats in long rows facing the front.

After being introduced and getting ready to start, a middle-aged executive got up and took over the microphone to ask an important question. He was a well-respected leader of the group, and tended to be a bit domineering.

He immediately asked Lee Mun Wah for his credentials:

"Do you have a license or a degree in Diversity Training?"

Lee Mun Wah had been doing seminars like this for years. His experience in Diversity Training could not be matched. But no institution had a degree in Diversity Training and licenses were not being offered by any body.

The executive insisted that if Mun Wah could not produce a degree or license the whole seminar should be cancelled and everyone go home.

Lee Mun Wah looked at the man and said,

"I understand that you would like me to show you a license or degree. You most certainly have a right to ask for my credentials. But no such licenses or degrees are currently given out by any institution."

"So, you have no credentials?" asked the charismatic executive.

Lee Mun Wah approached the man and put his hand gently on his shoulder. He looked at him with care and concern and said, "Before we continue, I have a question for you: 'If I were a white man instead of an Asian would you be asking for my credentials.'"

The executive was honest and sincere in his answer: "No!"

The seminar was on the verge of moving in one direction or another.

"Then I'd like for you to tell me more about that – I'm an Asian and you question my credentials...what is that about?"

The executive caught the care and affirmative tone of Mun Wah's voice.

"I was any Army Brat – raised by a mother and father in the Service. Our family was stationed in Indonesia. When I was 10 years old several Asian boys beat me up while other Asians just stood by and watched."

Lee Mun Wah went over to this handsome respected charismatic executive who was held in high esteem by his colleagues. Lee Mun Wah, put his hand gently on the man's shoulder and spoke in a soft kind tone: "If I would have been there, I would have not stood by and let that happen!"

The executive, who had never shown much emotion, began to weep. A deep connection was made. What could have been a nightmare of a seminar became an open dialog as others in the room began to make connections and talk more deeply about how they perceive and react to diversity. All were willing to learn.

'Mercy, Mercy, Mercy!'

That is what this parable is about – connections. The priest and Levite seemed disconnected from the man in the ditch. Although a fellow countryman – he was un-clean if dead or near death. He was more of an obstacle to their destination than a man in need of help.

The Samaritan, oft wounded, oft neglected, oft treated as an outcast saw the brokenness in the man and connected it with his own brokenness. The Samaritan had oft been treated like the man in the ditch. He'd been passed by. He knew the hurt and pain and so he connected.

The Samaritan was a marginalized person who connected deeply with the marginalized person on the road. He identified with and had a mother like compassion for the hurting man on the road. 'Mercy' is that deep connection that is made when compassion allows us to discover our human connections.

And is not that what God has done in Christ? We are wounded by sin and at death's door. Then as St. Paul writes:

*“For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.”* Romans 5:8ff

God enters in the midst of our adversity and knows just what to do – show mercy. Jesus’ Journey informs our journey with the cry for ‘Mercy, Mercy, Mercy.’

Church historian Martin Marty tells us that we are at a turning point in human history. Either we will turn toward tribalism and continue to separate from each other or embrace globalism and see our human connections.

Compassion is the key to our survival. Compassion is the key to our learning to live together. The one thing that ties the diverse religions of the world together is compassion. All faith traditions share in this trait called ‘Mercy!’

Karen Armstrong, writer and Biblical scholar, has created ‘The Charter for Compassion.’ It is an attempt to get a grass roots movement to begin dialog among our diverse traditions based on this one common thread – compassion. Here is an excerpt:

***The principle of compassion lies at the heart of all religious, ethical and spiritual traditions, calling us always to treat all others as we wish to be treated ourselves. Compassion impels us to work tirelessly to alleviate the suffering of our fellow creatures, to dethrone ourselves from the centre of our world and put another there, and to honour the inviolable sanctity of every single human being, treating everybody, without exception, with absolute justice, equity and respect.***

***...We therefore call upon all men and women ~ to restore compassion to the centre of morality and religion ~ to return to the ancient principle that any interpretation of scripture that breeds violence, hatred or disdain is illegitimate...***

***Rooted in a principled determination to transcend selfishness, compassion can break down political, dogmatic, ideological and religious boundaries.***

Armstrong is simply reflecting the Biblical mandate from Christ.

Mercy is about connections – God connecting to us in Christ and our connecting to each other in compassion. Christ wrote and lived ‘The Charter for Compassion’ ages ago. Isn’t time for each of us to sign it and live it? Amen

