

**Sermon - 09-05-21**  
**Ps 125; Pr 22:1-2, 8-9, 22-23;**  
**Ja 2:1-17; Mk 7:24-37**  
**Mercy Triumphs**

Forty years ago, when Henri Nouwen was collaborating on a book entitled, *Compassion*, he and his co-author went to see the Senator from Minnesota at his office in Washington DC. “Senator Hubert Humphrey asked, “How can I help you?” Father Nouwen said, “We’ve come to ask you, what is compassion?” The senator was taken back by a most unusual question in a congressional office. He got up from behind his desk, came around, and sat with them. He then picked up a #2 pencil and said, “In our country the whole lead and yellow length of this pencil is competition. Then at the very end of it we have this little eraser, and that – in our country – is compassion. Ours is not a country based on compassion but rather in its length and breadth is based on competition. But when we smear, blot, mess up things and people with our competition, we turn it around and, with this little fixer-upper of what we have messed up, we tidy things with compassion. Among us—unlike in the gospel— competition trumps compassion. Compassion becomes an after-thought, a remediation.” (*Little Stories of God’s Mercy*, Stephen V. Sundborg, S.J. 9/04/21 on [seattleu.edu](http://seattleu.edu))

The Apostle James talks about the mirror of God’s Word. Earlier in his letter to us, he talked about the law of liberty. This time he reminds us of the royal law: Love your neighbor as yourself. When the image of Jesus is pressed into our hearts, we begin to ignore the things that do not matter about another person: their income, their state of personal cleanliness, their level of education. We come to view every person as having sacred worth when the image of Jesus is formed in us. Whether this other person is a Jesus-follower or not doesn’t matter. It should not make a difference in how we treat him or her.

Jesus taught the New Covenant version of the Ten Commandments. He was expanding on the royal law: Love God and love your neighbor as yourself. The fifth New Covenant commandment, found in Mt 5 is: *Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.* The corollary to that law is that the way we see and treat others all our lives will be the way we will be treated when we stand before the Almighty and the great book of life is opened. This isn’t a threat. It follows a very basic rule of fairness. Little children understand that kindness begets kindness. Sharing begets sharing. This is ***so obvious*** that we can miss it – or forget it in the day-to-day grind. But James wants to drive this lesson home. He says, “If you have faith, then act by your faith.”

The Apostle Paul told the church at Corinth that we “walk by faith, not by sight.” He spoke of the very present reality of Christ’s kingdom here and now. It is unseen but is the truest reality in the universe. Living in Christ’s kingdom changes things – it rearranges the world. You could say it throws out a ton of junk that gets in the way.

God wants this to be easy and not hard for you and me. God wants this to feel right, not forced or strained to reference Christ’s kingdom every day – to all those around us. I once rode the tow truck to the auto shop. It was sort of fun to ride in the cab of a big rig. I was coming back from Hillsboro the day before. Suddenly dash lights started coming on and there was a power surge – the needles all swung to zero and back up. Scary. I drove home slowly. I crept up my street, opened the garage door and eased the car in. Not until that moment did it quit running. All the dashboard lights were on. I switched off the key. Then, I tried to start it again. It just went rrr—rrr—rrr. Called my insurance and arranged a tow truck for the next morning.

When I got to the service department, I brought the foreman out to the car and told him my story. I told him the Lord had made the car last just long enough to get me into the garage. And I said, “I am so thankful!” In the customer waiting area I got to tell my story again. The person I was speaking with agreed that I had been very blessed. We do not know what seeds we sow when we live by the law of liberty. We don’t brag about what we have done, but about what God has done. We are free to say so. Like those in the Gospel passage. The mother left her daughter at home and went to beg Jesus to heal her. Friends and neighbors brought a deaf man to the Lord and asked Him to touch him with healing. After the miracles, they ran and told everyone what Jesus had done. They could not keep quiet about God’s wonders. Neither can we.

*(Continued on next page.)*

When you and I open our mouth and proclaim God's glory, the kingdom comes rushing into the place. It is like a wind blowing through the dust and weariness of the worldly way.

“A frail old man went to live with his son, daughter-in-law, and four-year-old grandson. The old man's hands trembled, his eyesight was blurred, and his step faltered. The family ate together at the table. The elderly grandfather's shaky hands and failing sight made eating difficult. Peas rolled off his spoon onto the floor. When he grasped the glass, milk spilled on the tablecloth. The son and daughter-in-law became irritated with the mess. ‘We must do something about father,’ said the son. ‘I've had enough of spilled milk, noisy eating, and food on the floor.’ So the husband and wife set a small table in the corner. There, Grandfather ate alone while the rest of the family enjoyed dinner. Since Grandfather had broken a dish or two, his food was served in a wooden bowl. When the family glanced in Grandfather's direction, sometimes he had a tear in his eye as he sat alone.

One evening before supper, the father noticed his son playing with wood scraps on the floor. He asked the child, ‘What are you making?’ The boy responded, ‘Oh, I am making a little bowl for you and Mama to eat your food in when I grow up.’” The four-year-old smiled and went back to work.

The words struck the parents speechless. Not a word was spoken, but both knew what must be done. That evening the husband took Grandfather's hand and gently led him back to the family table. For the remainder of his days, he ate every meal with the family. And for some reason, neither husband nor wife seemed to care any longer when a fork was dropped, milk spilled, or the tablecloth soiled. ([wisdomcommons.org](http://wisdomcommons.org) accessed 9/3/21)

Remember the law that sets us free from the conventional wisdom of the world. Christ's law that sets us free from our sinful ways: The Law of Liberty. Remember that mercy wins over judgment. Remember the wooden bowl. Amen.