

Word for the World - Mercy

Micah 6: 6-8

Hebrews 4: 14-16

As you may have heard him say, this sermon series came about because of a picture that John had, a picture God gave him as he was praying, of an open Jiffy bag with a sheet of paper, and what was written on that paper is the basis of the sermon series. And it is very much about what we as Christians need to speak or show to the world, to the people around us. And we can't speak or act these things out unless we have first received them ourselves, which is why we set it in the context of who we are in Christ and our Christian values. And so we come this week to mercy. The reading from Hebrews talks about our need to boldly approach the throne of grace in order to receive the mercy that we need from God and then in Micah we read that God requires us to do justly, love mercy and walk humbly with Him. I hope that there isn't anyone here who doesn't know that they need God's mercy. The message of the Bible is clear, without the mercy of God, without His Grace and forgiveness (which we don't deserve) we face judgement. If we stand before the throne of God on our own, without having already received His mercy, grace and forgiveness through our faith in Christ, we cannot imagine how terrible that would be. In the face of His goodness and love our sinfulness and unworthiness will be overwhelming. Every unkind thought, word, deed, every single thing left undone that ought to have been done, from the smallest lie to the greatest disobedience - we would have to account for and we would have no justification. Our Grandson Elijah, at the ripe old age of 8 said to his mother the other day, "Mummy, don't you find sometimes a person's greatness can feel overwhelming?". Out of the mouths of babes. But the greatest and best people who have ever

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lived will not be able to stand in God's presence without having received the saving Grace of Jesus and God's mercy and loving kindness. If a mere human being's greatness can feel overwhelming then imagine what the greatness of God feels like. But we have received forgiveness through faith in Jesus and so the writer of Hebrews tells us that we can approach the very throne of God with confidence - some translations go further and say with boldness to receive the mercy and grace that we need. I was reading a commentary on Hebrews and I love the expression the writer uses - we dare not be prayerless. We dare not be prayerless, because it is at the throne of God that we receive mercy to cover the sins of yesterday and grace to meet the needs of today. And the mystery of this is all bound up in the high priesthood of Jesus. The responsibility of a priest is twofold, firstly to approach, to face God on behalf of the people, to bring their repentance, their cares, their deepest needs before Him and secondly to face the people and represent God's holy presence among the people. And Jesus is our great High Priest because He is the very reflection of God's glory. And we are, each and every believer, called to be members of a royal priesthood. We are in Christ and He is in us and we are called to pray for people, to represent them to the Father and in turn to face the people we know, our community, our country, our world and represent God's Holy presence. That sounds like an overwhelming task that none of us would feel equal to, but it is actually so simple. What does God ask of us? How do we represent His Holy presence, His Grace and Love to the world? We simply obey Him and we act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with Him. To unpack acting justly is a whole sermon in itself, but I encourage you

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to go to the throne and ask God in what ways He wants you to act justly. The word used for walk here is an encapsulation of a whole life, a life's journey walking humbly with God. But our focus today is mercy and we are told to love it. The Hebrew word used for love here *hesed* is especially rich in meaning. It is a steadfast, loyal love, it is almost as if God is saying, be wedded to mercy. What does it mean to be merciful? To be committed to being merciful, always, in every situation. Some translations use the word kindness which is a part of it, but it means so much more. It means not to think about, speak about, speak to or act towards someone in the way that they deserve. It means to forgive even when a person doesn't deserve it, it means to bless instead of curse, even when a person does not deserve blessing. Think of the many examples that Jesus used in parables. The Good Samaritan showed mercy to his enemy, the master who showed great mercy in forgiving his servant's debt, but was enraged when that servant didn't show mercy to the one that was indebted to him. And in His very life - as He hung dying in agony on the cross, He cried out to God to be merciful and to forgive the very people who had hung Him there. It is so simple, we are merely called to pay it forward - as we have received mercy, so we must be merciful in the same measure to others. So simple but not so easy. I stumble on this most days if I am honest. When I respond to others in my head and in my heart with annoyance, anger, resentment, unforgiveness, every time we do this we are withholding mercy and blessing, we who have received so much mercy and blessing dare to withhold it from others. But still we can approach the throne of God and receive more mercy and be forgiven and be given God's Grace to do better today. And this is God's word for the world - our world

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is broken, our country is broken, people we know are broken and in desperate need of God's mercy and loving kindness. And He has called us, you and me to reveal the greatness of His mercy by being merciful to others. There is no politician, no policy, no deal that can bring reconciliation, healing and wholeness to our nation and to our world. Ultimately only the love and mercy of God can. Our task isn't too big, it is really simple and it is really hard. But it is God's calling on all our lives, to act justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with Him.