

I Desire Mercy, Not Sacrifice
4PentecostA (Church Picnic)

“But when the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took her by the hand, and the girl got up.” Matthew 9:26

(Pull out crickets and show the children). Tell them that they were bought from a pet store. Do they know why the pet store sells crickets? Ask them what we should do with these crickets? What would it be like to show “mercy” to them? Feed them, give them water, let them go here at Palmer Park? What did God do for us when he sent His Jesus to die on the cross? (He set us free so we would not die).

A mother once approached Napoleon seeking a pardon for her son. The emperor replied that the young man had committed a certain offense twice and justice demanded death.

'But I don't ask for justice," the mother explained. 'I plead for mercy.'

'But your son does not deserve mercy," Napoleon replied.

'Sir," the woman cried, 'it would not be mercy if he deserved it, and mercy is all I ask for.'

'Well, then," the emperor said, 'I will have mercy.'" And he spared the woman's son.

Luis Palau, 'Experiencing God's Forgiveness,' Multnomah Press, 1984

Why should we show mercy? To be merciful is to be god-like, to be like Jesus.

The Prayer of Humble Access has endeared itself to generations. We typically say it in Rite One worship only. Yet the words could easily be said in Rite Two as well. “We do not presume to come to this thy Table, O merciful Lord, trusting in our own righteousness, but in thy manifold and great mercies. We are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under thy Table. But thou art the same Lord whose property is always to have mercy. Grant us therefore, gracious Lord, so to eat the flesh of thy dear Son Jesus Christ, and to drink his blood, that we may evermore dwell in him, and he in us. *Amen.*”

Jesus tells the Pharisees, “Go and learn what this means, ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice,’ for I have come not to call the righteous but sinners.” This is indeed the very property and character of God. Mercy trumps judgment.

Mercy satisfies sacrifice. To have mercy on someone is to have the authority to tell someone 'you lose!' or 'go to hell!' but instead say, "It's taken care of. Someone else paid the price in your place." Once on the checkout line at a grocery store, I discovered I did not have enough money to pay for food. Someone behind me offered to pay the price. It was one of the most humbling experiences. To show mercy is an act of kindness that is undeserved.

I can't help but think of the Hollywood films that gave us the noble characters of Ben Hur and the Gladiator. Each of these men was put in positions of power to choose how the balance of life and death would swing. To deliver mercy instead of punishment is both an act of compassion and shows strength of character.

The example of Jesus going into the homes of outcasts shows us that mercy and love go after those who need it most. Tax Collectors? Yes sir! The father whose daughter just died? You bet! The woman with years of hemorrhaging? Her too!

Chonda Pierce is a Christian comedian. She tells the story of when she took her family to "Midevil Times" in Orlando, Florida. Her little girl had braces, new eyeglasses and was at that stage of life that her knobby knees showed under a dress. Her name is Shara and she was feeling very self-conscious.

At these "Mid-evil Times" tournaments there is an arena with hundreds of people eating out of wooden bowls, waving turkey legs at the knights cheering for their chosen knight. The joust occurred with the Blue Knight against the Red Knight. And the Blue Knight, the knight that Chonda and her family were cheering for – won the joust.

All full of mud the Blue Knight rode his horse around the arena and he came near where the Pierce family was sitting and dismounted. He knelt and took off his blue scarf, kissed it and put it around Shara. He picked her up and put her on his horse. Then he paraded her around with the couple hundred people behind the tables cheering. Shara played it up and she nodded to the crowd left and right. Chonda says they wondered how they would get their little girl back in the car that night – she was so tickled. Finally, the Blue Knight took her to the throne where the king was waiting and presented her to him. "Your majesty, I present to you Princess Shara Kay Pierce." Chonda Pierce said to her own audience, "I had a thought when I saw what that did for my daughter. That's how God sees you. Jesus Christ came and fought the battle for you." And the scripture came to her, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1).

That is mercy. It is undeserved. It is unmerited. It is God, the King, receiving His child, forgiven and made presentable by Our Lord Jesus Christ. The prophet Hosea says, "For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the

knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.” The Psalmist says, “Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving and make good your vows to the Most High.” The sacrifice of battle has been made for us by Christ. Steadfast love and knowledge impresses God more than any church ritual we can do.

In Isaiah 53:5 we read – “But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed.”

As a physician he makes us well. We are made well when we feel awkward. When we are wounded and bruised he bids us to come and be healed. He takes us into His loving arms and sets us high on a mount as the Blue Knight did for Shara. And we hear the cheers of those who also know that the battle is won by the champion who loved us and gave himself for us. “Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” Amen. (Philippians 4:9-11).