9/21/20 Devotional

Let us contemplate the fifth beatitude from the Gospel of Matthew.

“*Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.”* Matthew 5:7

We continue our series on Jesus’ beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount. These declarations of blessedness characterize what it means to be happy or blessed in the Kingdom of God. Can there ever be enough mercy in the world? One of the key concepts to describe the character of God is that God is merciful.

The prophet Daniel says: *“The Lord our God is merciful and forgiving, even though we have rebelled against him.”*  *Psalm 145 says: “God is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.”*

The prophets exhorted the Jewish people to practice mercy in their lives. They urged people to be merciful because it was the will of God. God’s people were to practice mercy to both reflect the merciful God they worshipped and out of obedience to God. The prophet Micah declared: *“God has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God?*

Jesus was the fulfillment of the Jewish law and prophets. Jesus carried on the prophets’ mandate to practice mercy toward others. What does it mean to practice mercy? Those who obey God and embody mercy are compassionate, sympathetic, empathetic, kind, and forgiving. Mercy is an expression of love. Jesus makes the promise that those who are merciful will receive mercy.

Followers of Jesus are to be tender-hearted. We are to feel sympathy for others, but something even more. We are to be empathetic, which means to not only feel for others, but to feel with others. We are to develop the capacity to put ourselves in another’s place, to identify with another, to walk in another’s shoes. Mercy further means we are to practice forbearance toward others, to exercise restraint, to hold back, to spare hurting another, even when it is well within our power to humiliate someone. It is when we practice mercy, that we too shall receive God’s mercy.

**Herbert Prochnow wrote*: “You may be sorry that you spoke, sorry you stayed or went, sorry you won*** *or lost, sorry you thought the worst, sorry so much was spent. But as you go through life, you’ll find you were never sorry, you were kind.”*

I recall the story of the woman who pulled up to a tollbooth at the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge, and said: *”I’m paying for myself and the six cars behind me.” The next six drivers arrived at the booth, money in hand, and were told: “Some lady ahead already paid your fare, have a nice day.” The woman, it turned out, had read a note taped to a friend’s refrigerator, “Practice random kindness and senseless acts of beauty.”*

**How has God been merciful to you? Think about an incident when someone was merciful to you? Recall a time when you were merciful to someone. People remember when you have been kind to them. They don’t quickly forget. Even seemingly insignificant expressions of kindnesses make a big difference in another’s life. You never know how your action, even something small, might be just the right action at the right time. When one is discouraged, a simple act of compassion, a timely act of mercy, can renew someone’s faith in God and humanity and lift their downcast spirit.**

**One of my favorite quotes is by Quaker William Penn: *“I expect to pass through life but once. If therefore there be any kindness I can show, or any good thing I can do to any fellow being, let me do it now, and not defer or neglect it, as I shall not pass this way again.”***

**God’s mercy be with you,**

**Rev. Alan W. Deuel**