



Worship Service Theme: Mercy

Helpful Elements:

Green table covering (Ordinary Time)

Welcome: Welcome! It's so good to be together to celebrate faith and community today. My name is _____ and I'll be leading our worship time today. Our theme for today is **mercy**. The Bible has much to say about how to learn mercy, how to give mercy, and how to receive mercy.

Please pray with me as we open our time together.

Opening Prayer: Great and loving God, we ask your Holy Spirit to bless our time together and to refresh us with your presence. In the midst of a world full of trouble and strife, we thank you for watching over us, guiding us, and as we confess our sins, for forgiving us. Enable us to enter your presence joyfully and reverently, and let us depart today with the assurance that our sins are forgiven. Fill us, O God, with the peace which passes understanding. Amen.

Opening Hymn: Doxology

Statement of Faith: Let us affirm our statement of faith by reciting Psalm 23, "The Lord is my shepherd," together:

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

²He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.

³He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

⁴Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

⁵Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

⁶ Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Suggested Hymns:

**Holy Holy Holy
Jesus Loves Me**

First reading: Psalm 116:1-5

¹ I love the Lord, because he has heard
my voice and my pleas for mercy.

² Because the Lord inclined his ear to me,
therefore I will call on him as long as I live.

³ The snares of death encompassed me;
the pangs of Sheol laid hold on me;
I suffered distress and anguish.

⁴ Then I called on the name of the Lord:
"O Lord, I pray, deliver my soul!"

⁵ Gracious is the Lord, and righteous;
our God is merciful.

This is the word of the Lord; thanks be to God.

Suggested Hymns:

**Amazing Grace
His Eye is on the Sparrow**

Second reading: Matthew 18:21-33. The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant.

Peter came up to Jesus and said, "Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?" ²² Jesus said to him, "I don't say seven times, but seventy-seven times.

²³ "Therefore, [Jesus said], the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. ²⁴ When the king began to settle accounts, one servant was brought to the king who owed him ten thousand talents. *[A talent was like a bag of gold—worth about 20 years' labor. So this servant owed 10,000 bags of gold, or 200,000 YEARS of wages!]* ²⁵ And since the servant couldn't pay, the master ordered the servant to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, to make the payment. ²⁶ So the servant fell on his

knees and begged the master, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' ²⁷ And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave the debt.

²⁸ "But when that same servant went out from the king's room, he found a fellow servant who owed him a hundred denarii [*denarii = one day's wage. So the guy's fellow servant owes him 100 DAYS of wages*]. And seizing him, the first servant began to choke his fellow servant, saying, 'Pay what you owe me.' ²⁹ So the fellow servant fell down and begged him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' ³⁰ But the first servant refused and went and put his fellow servant in prison until he should pay the debt.

³¹ Now when the other servants saw what had taken place, they were distressed and went and reported [to the king] all that had taken place. ³² Then the master summoned the first servant and said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. ³³ Should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, just as I had mercy on you?'"

This is the word of the Lord; thanks be to God.

Suggested Hymns:

Softy and Tenderly

Nothing But the Blood of Jesus

Interactive Homily: Let's think a little more about mercy.

- What is your definition of mercy?
 - The dictionary says mercy is "compassion or forgiveness shown toward someone whom it is within one's power to punish or harm."
 - Mercy comes from the Latin word *miser cordia*, combining the words for "misery" and "heart" – compassion for someone else's misery.
 - Mercy means you actually have reason or justification to punish someone, but you don't. Mercy is choosing to act with compassion and forgiveness rather than punishment.
- Think of a time when you received mercy from a parent or a friend or even a stranger. What happened? What did that forgiveness feel like?
 - Unearned: not something you could have expected.
 - Humbling: not deserved.
 - Relief: the legitimate punishment is avoided.

- Now think about how it feels to extend mercy to someone else. How does that feel?
 - Relief again! Letting go of bitterness, anger, revenge, the burning desire to hurt the person the same way you were hurt.
- Have you ever found it hard to have mercy on someone? Why is it sometimes hard to forgive people, to have mercy on them?
 - They did something wrong! They don't "deserve" forgiveness.
- In the story that Jesus tells Peter about forgiveness, a king forgives his servant an impossible debt; but then that same servant refuses to forgive his fellow servant, who owes him a comparatively tiny amount. Why is this situation so offensive?
 - The first servant had his own impossible debt to pay and was released from that debt. But then the servant immediately refused to forgive even a tiny debt!
 - The first servant forgot his own *need* for mercy and the mercy he *received*.

[insert your own story, or use mine:] When I was very small, my mom had an intricate, one-of-a-kind piece of artwork, a sort of ceramic vase, made in Costa Rica, her home. It was the Tree of Life, with a bowl shape in the middle surrounded by figures of Adam and Eve, leaves, fruit, and other animals, and it was very beautiful. It sat on an end table underneath a light in our hallway.

One day when I was about 8 or 9, I was rushing for some reason and reached up to turn off the light – and my elbow hit the vase and tipped it onto our tile floor, where it broke into a hundred pieces.

I was horrified and collapsed on the floor crying, because I knew how much that piece meant to my mom, and I thought, "She's going to be SO MAD! I am in DEEP trouble!!"

But my mom came over to me, and guess what she did? She put her arms around me and comforted me, saying, "it's OK, it's OK ... it's just a vase."

That was mercy! She had every right to scold me or spank me ... but she had mercy on me.

- Forgiveness can shift how we feel about someone who has wronged us: We see past the surface and see that person's misery.

- What is the result, the feeling when you know you've been forgiven for every single wrongdoing in your life?
 - Gratitude, relief, renewal, freedom.
- How might God's mercy change how we act toward others?
 - When we remember how God is always merciful to us, we can become more merciful to others.

... Let's take a moment to silently pray and reflect on the blessing of mercy.

(Silent Prayer) ... Lord, hear our prayers. Now let us pray the Lord's prayer together:

Lord's Prayer: Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever, Amen.

Suggested Hymns:

This is My Father's World

Standing on the Promises

Third Reading: Quotes on Mercy

I have always found that mercy bears richer fruits than strict justice. –Abraham Lincoln

The Mercy of Allah is an Ocean; our sins are a lump of clay clenched between the beak of a pigeon. The pigeon is perched on the branch of a tree at the edge of that ocean [of mercy]. The pigeon only has to open its beak. –Sudanese writer Leila Aboulela

The quality of mercy is not strain'd,
 It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
 Upon the place beneath: it is twice blest;
 It blesseth him that gives and him that takes:
 ...[Mercy] is enthroned in the hearts of kings,
 It is an attribute to God himself;

And earthly power doth then show likest God's
When mercy seasons justice. –William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*

In this passage from the book *The Lord of the Rings*, the main character, Frodo, laments that his uncle Bilbo didn't kill the villain earlier.

"What a pity that Bilbo did not stab that vile creature, when he had a chance!" said Frodo.

But Frodo's friend, the wise wizard Gandalf, replies: "Pity? It was Pity that stayed Bilbo's hand. Pity, and Mercy: not to strike without need. And he has been well rewarded, Frodo. Be sure that Bilbo took so little hurt from the evil, and escaped in the end, because he began ...with Pity." –J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*

Suggested Hymns:

**Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing
Shall We Gather at the River**

Fourth Reading: 1 Peter 2:1-3, 9-10

¹So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander.² Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation— ³if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good. ...

⁹[You] are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. ¹⁰Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

This is the word of the Lord; thanks be to God.

Suggested Hymns:

**This Little Light of Mine
Swing Low, Sweet Chariot**

Closing Blessing: (Strike bell as you say the word "Lord")

The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine upon you, and be gracious unto you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and grant you peace. In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Closing Hymn: Doxology (Reprise)

Extra material:

The English preacher and theologian Charles Spurgeon said, “I recommend you, brothers and sisters, always to have one blind eye and one deaf ear.” A hard heart always makes a big deal of another person’s failure, but a tender heart, a merciful heart, often uses the blind eye and the deaf ear to [forgive] faults. As Spurgeon said, “My blind eye is the best eye that I have, and my deaf ear is the best ear I have.”¹

¹ As quoted here <https://openthe bible.org/open-the-bible-daily/cultivate-mercy/>