

One of the most beautiful attributes of the God we serve is the mercy we are offered through our faith in Jesus Christ. Christ’s mercy is shocking, it is unexpected, and yet in the gospel we see Christ bestowing mercy time and time and time again.

I remember a time in my youth where my father offered me mercy. I was driving my sister to a friend’s house. I had never been there before, and they lived off a curvy road. My sister told me to “turn here” after I had already missed the driveway. So, I turned still trying to make the driveway. The driveway was on a large slope, so I ended up running my car into a small tree bending up the license plate.

I was so upset. Not because of what happened to the car, but because of what my dad would say. You see, my dad took excellent care of the cars in our family and to him I thought this would be a slap in the face to come home with the license plate all bent up. I wondered, “Will I ever be able to drive again?”

I was preparing to be grounded for life as I slowly pulled into our driveway. Although my dad was disappointed, he reassured me he understood it was an accident that that is wasn’t anything that was unfixable. His response to me was mercy when I felt like I deserved punishment.

This is what God does for us. God in God’s mercy saves us from ourselves through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. God offers us mercy when we think we are headed for sure spiritual death. What an amazing God we serve!

This week we continue in our fifth week of our “Revival” sermon series and we celebrate Christ’s mercy in our lives. John Wesley expressed his gratitude to God by embodying Christ’s mercy to those he served.

One thing many Methodists do not know is how involved John Wesley became in the communities in which he served. John Wesley realized it was not enough to preach to people in the field if they were only going back to situations of struggle. He realized they would not be able to grow in their faith if they were struggling to survive.

So, John Wesley did something about that. He pooled his resources with his friend, George Whitefield and “built a schoolhouse that was used both for education and as a preaching house.”ⁱ This tradition of the importance of education continues today.

Did you know that universities started by Methodist include “Southern Methodist University, Duke University, Drew University, Boston University, Emory University, and the University of Southern California”?ⁱⁱ

John Wesley also cared about the health of the people he served. He saw that people kept dying due to poverty from things that didn’t need to cause death. So “in 1747 he published a book on ‘easy and natural’ methods ‘curing most diseases’ and allowed to the poor to come in on Fridays and received “basic medical care.”ⁱⁱⁱ

For Wesley, these acts of mercy, educating the poor, and providing basic medical care, was a way for him to show God’s love to his community. Today we as Methodists have thousands of ministries all over the world that advocate for the poor.

Today we too are invited to embody acts of mercy. These are also known as good works. Now we know that it is faith that saves us, but because we have faith good works flow out of us to show our love of God.

James 2 tells us “...So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.” Good works are the evidence of our faith. They also help others understand the love of God and as Adam Hamilton says: “Our own actions become the instrument God uses to change us.”^{iv}

Has this ever happened to you? Have you ever been to visit someone thinking that you would offer them Christ, only to be blown away by what they offered you?

I know this has happened to me many times in my faith journey. I remember when I was a little girl, we had this ministry at my church which served the homeless. These men, women, and their children would come spend a week at the church and we would go and help them serve dinner.

My mother invited me to come with her, so I did, but I have to admit I was scared. I had never met a homeless person before. I was very apprehensive when we arrived at the church. I served many plates to those who were there and when asked to sit down and join a family I did.

They immediately welcomed me and asked me about my life and shared with me about theirs. I learned something important that day. We are all just people. The world creates barriers for us to see each other, different hierarchies to understand who we are and who we can never be, but God sees us all the same as God’s children. I was blessed by getting to know that family that evening.

The important thing about doing works of mercy is that it gets us out of our bubbles and expands our worldviews so that we can deep the breadth and depth of God’s love for us.

I have to believe that Wesley also felt some apprehension as he went to preach out in the fields to strangers, as he went to visit people in prison, and as he put himself in contact with the poorest of the poor. But the benefit for the glory of God outweighed his fear. Wesley was modeling the mercy of Jesus Christ.

Jesus embodied mercy when he upheld the lowly, when he told his disciples to let the children come to him, when he healed lepers, and when he touched those whom no one would touch. He cared about the poor and upheld the widow’s mite. Jesus thought that all people were worthy of God’s love and healing and he advocated for justice and mercy.

Now Jesus has called us to be his hands and feet as we go out into the world embodying the mercy of Christ.

Throughout our lives we have the opportunity each day to choose mercy. We offer others mercy when we practice forgiveness, kindness, empathy, patience, and compassion. We offer others mercy when we help others when everyone else has said, “No.”

So often our first inclination is to respond in judgement instead of mercy. We see this was true in Jesus’ time as well. In John 8 we hear the story of the woman caught in adultery. When Jesus showed up her community was about to stone her as they were following the laws of Moses.

When they asked Jesus what they should do he said: “...let the one who has never sinned throw the first stone!” (John 8:7). That day Jesus saved this woman’s life and called her to a new one...he offered her mercy, but it did not come without some instruction. As Jesus sent her on her way he told her to: “Go and sin no more” (John 8:11).

Jesus covered his disciples in mercy. Our Gospel lesson from John 14 reminds us that they way that Christ bestowed mercy to the disciples was by promising them that an “Advocate” would continue to lead them forward that they would not be alone.

God’s continued mercy in our lives is the work of the Holy Spirit. The one who leads us forward to continue to practice works of mercy.

We are an extension of the mercy of Christ and we are called to offer mercy to each person we encounter. To offer the mercy of Christ to our neighbors we must first embody the ministry of noticing.

Jesus teaches us about this kind of ministry. In Luke 19, Jesus noticed there was a man trying to see him coming down the road who had climbed a tree to see him. Jesus could have noticed this man and kept going, but he wanted to build a relationship with this man so that he would continue the kingdom of God.

Zacchaeus was that man. He certainly had not been practicing works of mercy. In fact, he had been taking advantage of people by taxing them more than they owed. That is how he had become rich.

But Jesus saw something in Zacchaeus and knew he could be an instrument for God’s glory. That day Jesus changed his heart and he gave half of his possessions to the poor and payed back those he had scammed four-fold.

Zacchaeus’ first act of faith was an act of mercy. We too are called to respond to our faith in Christ with acts of mercy.

Who is someone in your life who needs God’s mercy? How can you reach out to that person and celebrate with them that they are a child of God?

Each day God gives us at least five opportunities to share the mercy of Christ. Whether we bestow it upon our family, friends, or strangers, this kind of mercy is the kind of thing that changes peoples’ lives.

The good news for our lives today is that Christ’s mercy is available to us each and every day through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit.

We are called to respond to this extravagant act of God with thanksgiving.

We are thankful to God when we take time each day to list what God has done for us. We are thankful to God when we seek out to be part of offering God’s mercy in our communities.

We are thankful to God when we receive the mercy that has been offered to us and don’t beat ourselves up. We are thankful to God, when we take time out the busyness of our lives to serve those in need of mercy.

How will you receive Christ’s mercy today? Will you let go of the things that have been holding you back to serve God?

Each day we have a decision to make to follow the will of God or to follow our own will...to choose judgement or mercy...to choose our neighbors or choose fear. May we cast aside our fear and apathy and be the hands and feet of Christ to everyone we encounter. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Endnotes

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- ⁱ Adam Hamilton. “Revival: Faith As Wesley Lived It.” Abingdon Press: Nashville, TN. 2014. P. 111.
ⁱⁱ Ibid.
ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid. P. 113.
^{iv} Ibid. P. 109.

Additional Resources

Keck et al. New Interpreter’s Study Bible. Vol. X11. Abingdon Press: Nashville, TN. 1995.
Wesley Study Bible