

Lenten service for March 18, 2020

(This serviced includes the two sections involving two of the Beatitudes in Matthew 5 that are the basis of our Lenten devotions)

P: The Lord has called us to be His disciples and He promises us:

C: “Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.”

P: O Lord, deal with us not after our sins.

C: Do not reward us according to our iniquities,

P: O God, merciful Father, because You despise not the sighing of a contrite heart nor the desire of the sorrowful, mercifully assist our prayers which we make before You in all our troubles and adversities as they come upon us, and graciously hear us, so that those evils which the craft and subtlety of the devil and man’s work against us may by Your good guidance be brought to nothing that we, Your servants, being hurt by no afflictions, may evermore give thanks to You in Your holy Church through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

C: Amen.

Psalm 136

P: Give thanks to the LORD, for He is good.

C: His mercy endures forever.

P: Give thanks to the God of gods.

C: His mercy endures forever.

P: Give thanks to the Lord of lords:

C: His mercy endures forever.

P: He remembered us in our low estate

C: His mercy endures forever.

P: and freed us from our enemies.

C: His mercy endures forever.

P: He gives food to every creature.

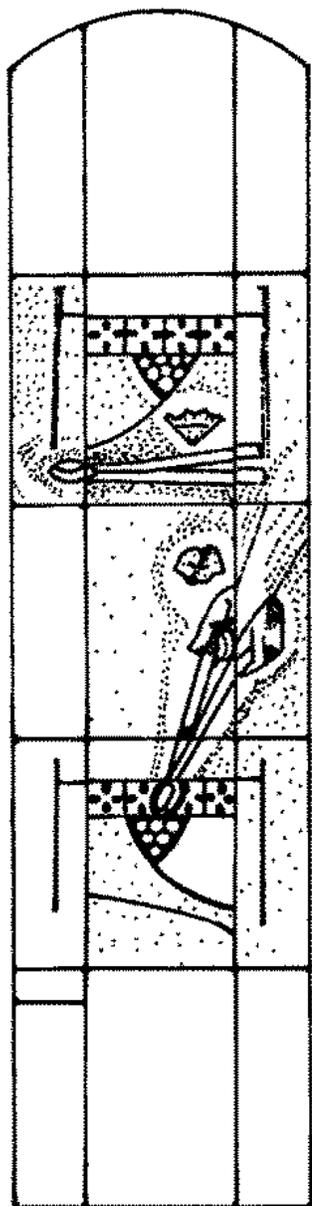
C: His mercy endures forever.

P: Give thanks to the God of heaven.

C: His mercy endures forever.

We continue looking at the Beatitudes. Tonight we look at “Blessed are the merciful” and “Blessed are the pure in heart.” It can be very helpful to look at these together because they led u away from two extremes—saying our faith, but not living it and doing what looks like our faith, but not trusting in it.

“Blessed are the merciful.”



To the left is a picture from one of the parable windows in our church. It depicts the parable of the two sons. The lips at the top represent the first son who says he will do what his father wants, but we see how the clippers sit on the ground. He does not do what his father wanted him to do. The lower set of lips are the second son who says, "No," to his father, then does what he is supposed to do. Jesus asks, "Which son did his father's will?" The answer is given, "The second one."

We are told that, "actions speak louder than words." Mercy is not just an attitude or sympathy. It is putting that into action. In the Old Testament there is a special word for mercy, the mercy God has for His people. It has been translated "loving kindness." It is not simply God's feeling for us; it is God doing things. Psalm 136, part of which above is in our responses, ends each verse with the words, "And His loving kindness (mercy) endures forever. Here is a popular example of mercy:

Queen Victoria was a close friend of Principal and Mrs. Tulloch of St. Andrews. Prince Albert died and Victoria was left alone. Just at the same time Principal Tulloch died and Mrs. Tulloch was left alone. All unannounced Queen Victoria came to call on Mrs. Tulloch when she was resting on a couch in her room. When the Queen was announced Mrs. Tulloch struggled to rise quickly from the couch and to curtsy. The Queen stepped forward: "My dear," she said, "don't rise. I am not coming to you today as the queen to a subject, but as one woman who has lost her husband to another."

But a better example of God's mercy can be seen in Tommy Pigage. "I want to tell you about the night I killed Ted Morris." With those words he started his court-appointed appearance at the Trigg County High School "Mothers Against Drunk Driving" meeting with a trembling voice. Standing in the back of the gym was Elizabeth Morris, Ted's grieving mother. In time she would not only forgive Tommy, but unofficially adopt the young man who had collided with her son while driving drunk. Years later Tommy would call Elizabeth every day from 4 to 5 PM. Because of her mercy, his life changed.

God's mercy means He reaches out. It doesn't just mean He spares us or refrains from punishing us like a "merciful" judge. His mercy is not just negative in terms of what He not do to us. His mercy is even more positive in what He does for us. Our acts of mercy come from the fact that God is so merciful to us. That mercy moves us to not just sympathize, but to do something.

Response:

P: "Be merciful to me, my God, for my enemies are in hot pursuit; all day long they press their attack." (Psalm 56:1)

C: “Have mercy on me, my God, have mercy on me, for in You I take refuge. I will take refuge in the shadow of Your wings until the disaster has passed.” (Psalm 57:1)

P: “May God be merciful to us and bless us and make his face shine on us.” (Psalm 67:1)

C: “The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love.” (Psalm 103:8)

P: “And He passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, “The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and merciful God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness.” (Exodus 34:6)

C: “For this reason He had to be made like them, fully human in every way, in order that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that He might make atonement for the sins of the people.” (Hebrew 2:17)

P: “But because of His great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.” (Ephesians 2:4-5)

C: “Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.” (1 Peter 2:10)

P: “They are always generous and merciful; their children will be a blessing.” (Psalm 37:26)

C: “Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.” (Luke 6:36)

ALL: “Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.”

Psalm: 24

P: The earth is the LORD’s, and everything in it,

C: the world, and all who live in it;

P: for He founded it on the seas

C: and established it on the waters.

P: Who may ascend the mountain of the LORD?

C: Who may stand in His holy place?

P: The one who has clean hands and a pure heart,

C: who does not trust in an idol or swear by a false god.

P: They will receive blessing from the LORD

C: and vindication from God their Savior.

P: Such is the generation of those who seek Him,

C: who seek your face, God of Jacob.

Message: *“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.”*

“Pure in heart.” Being pure involves being clean. That is something very much in our minds as we are told the best thing we can do to prevent the spread of the corona virus is to wash our hands. It is like a window that is totally clean, one that shows no smears even when the sun is shining through it. But being “pure in heart” involves something much deeper.

After World War 2 the United States shipped all kinds of aids to the countries in Europe that had been torn apart from the war. This included the defeated enemy Germany. It was called the “Marshall Plan” after George Marshall, who had been the very general who led our army in the war. It was aid, not a loan. Winston Churchill called it the most generous act of any country in history. Yet what really caused the plan to get through Congress was not generosity, but fears

that the communists would take over Western Europe if the countries did not recover economically.

More unknown is what happened at the end of World War One. Among the ruins of the war was the crisis in the brand new Soviet Union was an extreme drought that led to famine. Millions of people were soon to die of starvation unless something drastic was done. The “American Relief Administration” (ARA) had been set up to help other nations in Europe. It was led by Herbert Hoover, one of the most capitalist people on earth. Hoover led the ARA to expand into the Soviet Union. He had to work with Lenin, the communist founder of the Soviet Union. To get supplies to the people over the railroads involved the intervention of Felix Dzerzhinsky, the head of the secret police. By rescuing millions of people from starvation, Hoover and the ARA allowed the Soviet Union to continue. It certainly seemed like something “pure in heart.”

But even then the ARA’s efforts were enhanced by the profits US farmers made selling their crops and the positive publicity the ARA received.

“Pure in heart” means something totally genuine. It involves not just the action, but what is behind it. Jesus noticed the widow who put a few pennies into the temple treasury for the poor. This was in contrast to people who put in substantial amounts, but Jesus said her gift was bigger because it was all she had; it was done out of love, not to show off to others or make herself feel good.

“Pure” means not just clean, but straight-- undivided. A pure heart is one set on God. It is to be “straight minded” on God. It is what Psalm 24 says a person needs to have to enter into the presence of God. It is what happens as a person looks in faith to Christ Jesus.

Jesus says the “pure in heart” will see God. When we hold straight to faith in Jesus, then we see God. If we come to God with anything else in mind, then things are cloudy and vague. But it is in faith in Jesus that we can see God.



Faith—it is two sides of the same coin. It involves both having the pureness coming out in acts of mercy and the mercy coming from real love. You can’t in reality separate the faith in Jesus from what it works in us. We separate them only to help emphasize that faith is what produced the deeds, not the other way around, so that our salvation always depends on what God gives us, not what we do.

Merciful and pure in heart—that’s what it means to be blessed by God!

Response

P: “Your promises are pure, and Your servant loves them.” (Psalm 119:140)

C: “**And the words of the LORD are pure, like silver purified in a crucible, like gold**

refined seven times.” (Psalm 12:6)

P: “Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be pure; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.”
(Psalm 51:7)

C: “Wash and make yourselves pure. Take your evil deeds out of my sight; stop doing wrong.” (Isaiah 1:16)

P: “Jesus reached out His hand and touched the man. ‘I am willing,’ Jesus said. ‘Be pure!’ And immediately the leprosy left him.” (Luke 5:13)

C: “You are already pure because of the word I have spoken to you.” (Luke 15:3)

P: “Jesus makes the Church holy, purifying her by the washing with water through the word.”
(Ephesians 5:26)

C: “For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, because it is purified by the word of God and prayer.” (1 Timothy 4:4-5)

P: “But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, His Son, purifies us from all sin. If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

C: “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:7-9)

P: “Therefore, since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.”
2 Corinthians 7:1)

C: “Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart.” (1 Peter 1:22)

P: “Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, and do not share in the sins of others. Keep yourself pure.” (1 Timothy 5:22)

C: “To the pure, all things are pure, but to those who are corrupted and do not believe, nothing is pure. In fact, both their minds and consciences are corrupted.” (Titus 1:15)

P: “But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.” (James 3:17)

C: “Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable— if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.” (Philippians 4:8)

ALL: “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.”

Lord’s Prayer

Evening Prayer: I thank You, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son, that You have graciously kept me this day; and I pray that You would forgive me all my sins where I have done wrong, and graciously keep me this night. For into Your hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Your Holy angel be with me, that the evil foe may have no power over me. Amen.