

## **St John's All Age Worship 8th July 2018**

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

Micah reading – Phil's sketch.

I wonder what you made of the sketch at the start? (A drama based on Monty Python's 'Four Yorkshiremen' sketch, in which the four men try to outdo each other's exaggerated stories of their childhood poverty.)

In the Old Testament Micah challenged those who thought their religious activities were pleasing to God – their sacrifices, their offerings, their festivals.

He said, no, it's not religious practices – no matter how lavish and grand they might be – that really please God – it's living a life of justice, mercy and humility before him. That's what really matters.

Act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with God.

It's not what we do here on a Sunday morning that really matters – it's how we live when we walk through those doors at the end of the service.

We can sing our hearts out, receive communion, pray, read the Bible, listen to sermons, tithe, fast....but what matters is how we live tomorrow.

Are we known for our justice, mercy and humility?

This morning we are on week 6 of our sermon series on the Beatitudes, Jesus's words to his disciples at the beginning of Matthew 5, and today we are looking at v 7

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

So what does it mean to be merciful?

I want you to close your eyes and use your imagination now.

I want you to imagine you are living in Jesus day, and that you have leprosy, a skin disease. Because of your disease you are not allowed to go near other people. You have to ring a bell and shout 'unclean, unclean' when anyone comes near. You are excluded from the community, and looked down on by those around you. They suspect you have sinned greatly. You are an outcast.

And then you hear about a man who has the power to heal. You may have seen him in action – from a distance. And then one day he comes your way.

You find yourself moving towards him, falling on your knees before him and you beg him, "Lord if you are willing, you can make me clean."

And Jesus, filled with compassion for you, reaches out a hand and touches you.

"I am willing" he says, "Be clean"

And instantly you are healed, cured, clean, whole.

You have been shown mercy, not judgement. How does it feel?

A second story:

You are blind, and earn a living by begging outside the gates of Jericho. Most people don't notice you, many look down on you, wondering what sin you committed that caused your blindness. Then you hear that Jesus the healer is approaching, and something stirs deep in your heart – here is someone who just might be able to help you.

You cry out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Those around you rebuke you, and tell you to be quiet, but you shout all the louder, "Jesus Son of David, have mercy on me!"

Then someone tells you Jesus has stopped and is calling you, so you get up, and move towards where you think Jesus is.

And you hear him say, "What do you want me to do for you?"

"Rabbi, I want to see." You reply.

You hear Jesus say, "Go, your faith has healed you." And suddenly your eyes are opened, and for the first time ever you can see.

You have been shown mercy, not judgment. How does it feel?

A third story:

You have been caught red-handed, participating in an activity forbidden by law. In fact the law says that for such a wicked, immoral act you should be stoned. Those who caught you have dragged you to the public square, and a crowd has gathered, stones in hand. They are self-righteous, angry, judgemental, looking down on you.

And someone says to Jesus who is standing nearby, "Teacher, our Law commands us to stone a person like this. Now what do you say?"

And Jesus waits. He isn't ruffled by their persistent questioning. He bends down, and writes something in the sand. Slowly he stands up and says, "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone."

In the silence your heart is beating so hard you are sure everyone must be able to hear it.

But one by one the crowd slowly drift away, the oldest first, until it's just you and Jesus left.

"Where are they?" he says to you, "Has no-one condemned you?"

"No, no-one," you reply, and Jesus says, "Then neither do I condemn you. Go now and leave your life of sin."

You have been shown mercy, not judgement. How does it feel?

Jesus lived a life of mercy. Where others looked in judgement, Jesus was moved by compassion. When others shunned people, Jesus reached out and touched them. When some ignored or tried to silence those who disturbed the peace, Jesus listened to them and welcomed them. When some looked in judgment and condemnation and wanted to hurl stones, Jesus chose not to condemn, but to offer freedom and a new way of life.

And even on the cross, as he looked at those who had put him there, he prayed, "Father forgive them. They don't know what they are doing."

That's mercy. Mercy is when someone does not give us what we deserve. When someone chooses to forgive, or to let someone off the hook, because the relationship they have with the person matters more than the debt that is owed to them.

God shows us mercy. He doesn't treat us as our sins deserve. When we were still sinners Christ died for us so that we can be reconciled to God.

And in our gospel reading today, Jesus says to us, "Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good, lend to those who can't pay you back". Why? "Because God is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. "

Think about your own life. Who has shown you mercy? Who has forgiven you? Loved you when you didn't deserve to be loved. Given to you without expecting anything in return. Shown you kindness when you were ungrateful.

God has. Maybe others have too.

A harder question: who in your life needs you to show them mercy? Is there someone who needs your forgiveness? Your compassion? Your handshake? Your welcome?

This isn't easy. It's costly. It was costly for Jesus. But he wants us to be like him.

Both as individuals and as his church.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

Pray