

Devotions with Matt

May 2, 2020

THE MERCIFUL

A mother once approached Napoleon seeking a pardon for her son. The emperor replied that the young man had committed a certain offense twice and that justice demanded death for him. "I don't ask for justice", the mother explained, "I plead for mercy." "Your son doesn't deserve mercy", Napoleon replied. "Sir", the woman cried, "it would not be mercy if he deserved it."

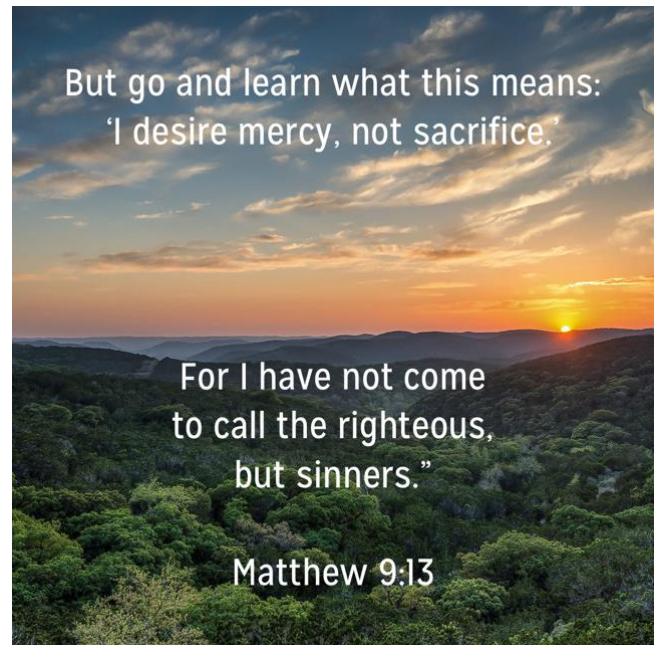
Often people confuse compassion for mercy. Compassion is bringing justice to the innocent. It is a heartfelt response to the needs of others. It is a sympathetic pity and concern

for the sufferings and misfortunes of others: the downtrodden, the poor, the hurting. Compassion, during this time of COVID-19, is deciding to wear a mask to the store in order to protect the workers. It is deciding to close church services to protect the most vulnerable among us. It is an act of generosity toward someone in need. We have seen many acts of compassion during this time. Maybe you have been one of the compassionate ones lately, or maybe you have been the recipient of it. Compassion warms the heart.

If you have even been shown mercy you know the difference. Mercy extended only happens to the guilty. It is granted to those who don't deserve it. God showed His great mercy to us on the Cross. Although we were guilty, He made us innocent. Although we deserved punishment for our guilt, He took our punishment for us. God's mercy is not getting what we deserve.

Jesus continues His teaching in the Beatitudes in Matthew 5 and says, "Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy." If we took this Scripture in sequential order we might understand it as once we have shown mercy we then, and only then, will receive it. But we know God's mercy to us on the cross came before any one of us ever showed mercy to another. It is easy to look at God as one who grants forgiveness, salvation, grace or mercy only to those who earn it. But that has never been the case. The Apostle Paul reminds us that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. While we were still dead in our sin and guilt and shame, Christ died for us. While we were in a place where mercy wasn't required, mercy was given.

What Jesus is saying to us in this Beatitude is that once we have experienced God's mercy, we will desire to extend it to others. We will want to give what we have received. Later in Matthew Jesus tells a parable about an unmerciful servant who was forgiven a great debt that he owed to the king. As soon as he left the king's presence a forgiven and free man, he went out to find a fellow servant who owed him a very minor debt. When



that person couldn't repay him he had him thrown in jail. The king finds out about it and calls this unmerciful servant in and says, "Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?" With that, he was also sent to jail. For all who have met Jesus and been forgiven much, we must forgive much. For all who have been pardoned our great debts, we must pardon the little ones owed us. For all who are guilty of sin and have been shown mercy, we must go and do likewise.

Someone once said, "Christ's mercy, like water in a vase, takes the shape of the vessel that holds it." Blessed are the merciful because we have been shown mercy.

Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.' For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners." Matthew 9:13

In Christ,

Matt