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Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

“THE MERCIFUL”
Matthew 5:7

Matthew 5:7 ~ **“Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.”**

Grass Valley, California, was under siege by Mother Nature. Gale-force winds were toppling trees, torrential rains were flooding the streets, and the power was out. A priest was struggling to write his Sunday sermon by candlelight when the phone rang.

It was a nurse from the hospital in Auburn. **“Father O’Malley, we have a terminally ill patient who is asking [for] his last rites,”** she said. **“Can you come?”**

“I’ll try my best to make it,” he answered.

It took two hours to cover the 30 miles to Auburn. When he made it inside, the night nurse told him about her patient: **“[Tom] ...is slipping fast... He’s been an alcoholic for years, and his liver has finally given out. He’s been here for a couple of weeks this time and hasn’t had one single visitor. He lives up in the woods, and no one around here knows much about him....”**

Tom was thin. His skin had a sickly, yellow tinge.

“Hello, Tom. I’m Father O’Malley. I was passing by and thought we could talk a bit...”

“Don’t give me that garbage,” Tom replied. **“I asked that dumb nurse to call someone to give me my last rites...Now get on with it!”**

The priest recited the prayers. Afterwards, he asked Tom if he would like to make his confession.

“Absolutely not,” Tom answered. **“But I would like to just talk.”**

They made small talk for a few hours. Every so often Father O’Malley invited the dying man to make confession. He refused the first four invitations.

But the fifth time, Tom said yes. **“When I was young, I did something bad. So bad, I’ve never told anyone about it.”**

“I worked as a switchman on the railroad all my life, until I retired a few years ago and moved up...to the woods. Thirty–two years, two months, and eleven days ago, I was working in Bakersfield on a night like tonight.”

Tom’s face became intense.

“It happened during a bad winter storm with a lot of rain, fifty-mile-an-hour winds and almost no visibility. It was two nights before Christmas and the whole yard crew drank all through the swing shift.”

“I was drunker than the rest. So I volunteered to go out in the rain and wind and push the switch for the northbound 8:30 freight.”

Tom’s voice dropped almost to a whisper.

“I was more drunk than I thought. I pushed that switch in the wrong direction. At 45 miles an hour that train slammed into a passenger car at the next crossing and killed a young man, his wife and their 2 daughters. I’ve had to live with my being the cause of their deaths every day since then.”

Tom’s confession hung in the air. After what seemed like an eternity, Father O’Malley gently put his

hand on Tom's shoulder and quietly said, **"If I can forgive you, God can forgive you, because in that car were my mother, my father and my two older sisters."**

That is mercy! And insofar as I can determine, that story is true.

📖 Mercy is compassionate or kindly forbearance shown toward an offender, an enemy, or other person in one's power.

👍 To go out of your way to help a beggar who has no one but himself to blame for his problems, and who will never repay you – that is mercy.

👍 To hold your tongue when you know some fool's most humiliating secrets – that is mercy.

👍 To speak gently when you are well-able to destroy your foe with cutting words – that is mercy.

👍 To not lay a finger on your adversary when you could beat him to a pulp – that is mercy.

👍 To hold your enemy's heart in hand and not crush it – that is mercy.

✝ It is epitomized in Jesus' pardon of the Jewish leaders, Pilate, the Roman soldiers and the heckling mob **from the cross**: {Lk 23:34} **"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."**

📖 Hear Matthew 5:7 again ~ **"Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy."** {Wright} **"Wonderful news for the merciful! You'll receive mercy yourselves."**

🔑 Remember, the Beatitudes are:

⊕ 1st, a word picture of an alternate reality named the Kingdom of God, a community that is radically different from most secular and religious culture; and,

⊕ 2nd, they are an invitation to enter the Kingdom, {Wright} **"a summons to live in the present in the way that will make sense in God's promised future; because the future *has arrived in the present* in Jesus."**

☐ God's Kingdom is built on mercy: **"Let the wicked forsake their ways and the unrighteous their thoughts. Let them turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on them"** (Isaiah 55:7).

◆ Yet the merciless have no place in the Kingdom.

☛ Don't misunderstand! God is good. He blesses us with countless gifts we have not earned (that is grace), and at the same time He protects us from many punishments we have earned several times over (that is mercy).

But there is a catch. Here it is:

① God's mercy is a work of love;

② God's love entices a love response – He never compels us to love in return (that would be an assault or, to be more blunt, a spiritual rape -- and that is not love);

③ Hence, God gives us freedom either to receive or reject him and his gifts, including mercy;

④ Receiving God's mercy is a condition for citizenship in his kingdom;

⑤ All of God's kingdom gifts, including mercy, transform us by duplicating themselves within us;

⑥ Thus, as we receive and experience God's mercy in Christ, we gradually become merciful like Him;

⑦ But if we reject God's mercy we will neither receive it nor experience it, and it will not be duplicated within us; and so,

⑧ If God's mercy is not duplicated within us, it is a sign that we are not citizens of his kingdom.

□ As James warns, {Jas 2:13} **“Judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful.”**

□ Consider the Parable of the Unmerciful Servant in Matthew 18:

A servant owes his king an absurd amount of money, equal to 20 years worth of wages. The man cannot repay his debt. (Who could?) So the king puts him and his family and their belongings up for sale.

The servant begs, {Mt 18:26} **“Be patient with me and I will pay back everything.”** (Yeah, right!) Still, the king takes pity, cancels the man's debt, and lets him go free.

Then the servant goes out and finds another servant who owes him 3 month's wages. He grabs the man and begins to choke him, {Mt 18:28} **“Pay back what you owe me!”** he demands.

His fellow servant falls to his knees and begs {Mt 18:29} **“Be patient with me and I will pay you back.”** Instead, the first servant has the second arrested and orders him imprisoned until his whole debt is repaid.

The king hears what happened and he is furious: {Mt 18:32-33} **“You wicked servant! I canceled all that debt of**

yours because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?” He throws the man in jail for punishment, until the man completely settles up. (Only you know he'll never be able to do that.)

Having received the priceless wealth of God's mercy poured out in Christ Jesus, let us live as kingdom citizens by sharing God's mercy with each other, our blood relations, our colleagues, our neighbors, and even strangers, great and small, worthy and unworthy.

□ **“Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.” “Wonderful news for the merciful! You'll receive mercy yourselves.”**

This is the Word of the Lord.