

Easter 6 –May 25, 2014

Text: Matt 5:7

Theme: "Jesus Savior Pilot Me"

During the Easter Season, we are looking at the windows on the North side of the sanctuary, the Beatitude windows. Each window depicts one of the beatitudes. Today we look at the fifth one, the picture of which is printed on the cover of your bulletin for reference. The Beatitude is,

"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy." What is mercy? Mercy as defined by Webster is, *"kind or forgiving treatment of someone who could be treated harshly"* and that definition certainly could apply to what Christ did for us. We deserved nothing and yet he died on the cross and suffered hell for us. So it seems that the word mercy is really defined by Christ's work. How would we really know what mercy was had Christ not delivered it to us first?

We are not, by nature, merciful. Even in the sin fallen world of the wild, while animals are not generally cruel unless they are ill, they do not practice mercy. If an antelope could beg for mercy, a hungry lion would not care. The law of survival is simple. Everything eats and everything is eaten until you get to the top of the food chain. And we, at the top of the food chain, are not innately merciful either. We have to be taught and empowered in order to be merciful.

Jesus did just that. In the Gospel according to Mark, he said, "For truly, I say to you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ will by no means lose his reward" (Mark 9:41). Jesus defined a cup of water as the most minimum act of mercy. So the cup of water became a symbol recognized by both Christians and non-Christians for the most basic acts of mercy.

The fifth window is a picture of a pitcher pouring water into a cup. Water is the most essential element for life. Without water, no one lives for more than a few days. There is a reason that Jesus chooses water as a metaphor for salvation and why he uses water to transmit grace in Baptism. Just as no one can maintain physical life without water, so no one can maintain spiritual life without faith. If your body dehydrates completely, you die. If your faith dehydrates completely, you die. But this is the second death, a far worse death. All of our bodies die eventually. We know that and embrace that because we know that when our body dies, we move into the glorious life promised by Christ. But the second death is to be feared. The second death is the death of our soul, which can only happen if our faith is starved.

Jesus reminded the woman at the well that he gives water that is far greater than the water her father Jacob drew from that well. He gives us Baptismal water and that water is the greatest act of mercy ever given. God used water many times in the Holy Scriptures

to help us get the point of our salvation and we still miss it. God delivers us through water – it is his greatest act of mercy. Noah and his family were delivered as their ark rose above the destruction below them. The people of Israel were delivered as The Red Sea closed over the Egyptian army. Jonah was delivered from death by being swallowed by the whale where there was air to breathe. Even Jesus received water on the cross to prolong his life, increase his suffering and complete the purchase of our souls from Satan.

Water is both comforting and terrifying. A gentle lake becomes a roaring sea that capsizes boats and drowns their occupants. A spring rain becomes a torrent that swells rivers and destroys everything in its path. Water is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, we need it to live. On the other hand, it can take our lives. Similarly, God is both comforting and terrifying. On our own, we could not face him because we are corrupted by sin and would be destroyed by his gaze. That is why he sent his son and why in the Gospel for today, his son promises the coming of the Holy Spirit. We are not left to bob to and fro on stormy seas like an unmanned rowboat. His mercy extends even beyond salvation.

Christ, through the Holy Spirit, mercifully pilots us through the waters rushing all around us. I'm not sure what irritates me more, Christians who are so arrogant that they think all their blessings are their own doing or Christians who are so ignorant that they talk

about how lucky they are. Jesus is in the wheelhouse. He is piloting us through these stormy seas not you. I wouldn't trust you to pilot a toy boat in a bathtub. And when great blessings come your way or great tragedy is narrowly averted, the name of the pilot is Jesus, not luck, chance or fate. Take a moment to thank him at least.

I spoke with someone once who told me the story of his life, how he had been so lucky, nearly missing serious injury, recovering from serious illness. "Someone upstairs was really helping him out." I cringed. I politely told him that he was not lucky but that Jesus runs this Ocean Liner and he watches over every move we make, sometimes strengthening us for hardship and sometimes lifting us above the fray. He said, "Well, I'm not much of a church goer so I don't know about all that religious stuff, but I sure was lucky." What are you going to do with that kind of ignorant arrogance?

All we can do with people like that is to do what Jesus did for us, show mercy. We don't expect them to understand or even to acknowledge the mercy. We just keep filling their cups because how can we do otherwise? Jesus keeps filling ours. As we hear God's Word and eat and drink his body and blood, our cups runneth over and spill into the lives of people all around us. That's what we do now. We spread mercy.