

Sunday, October 24, 2010
Lectionary 30
Proper 25
Twenty-second Sunday after Pentecost

Jeremiah 14:7–10, 19–22
Psalm 84:1–7
2 Timothy 4:6–8, 16–18
Luke 18:9–14
Year C

I.N.I.

Lord, have mercy. Christ have mercy. Lord have mercy. I can still hear my Grandpa Hoffmeier, the grade-school educated farmer from New Jersey sing at my side, *Lo'd have moisy upon us. Christ have moisy upon us. Lo'd have moisy upon us.*

Would you repeat another, older version, with me?

Kyrie

The image shows three staves of musical notation for a Kyrie. The first staff is labeled 'Leader' and the second 'Assembly'. The lyrics are: 'Lord, have mer - cy. Lord, have mer - cy.' on the first staff; 'Christ, have mer - cy. Christ, have mer - cy.' on the second staff; and 'Lord, have mer - cy. Lord, have mer - cy.' on the third staff. The music is in a simple, plainsong style with a single melodic line on a treble clef staff.

Music: Plainsong

It's an ancient prayer, sung by angelic choirs and muttered by criminals. Mercy!

It's in a place where we find ourselves, after exhausting all other options and depleting them. We've run out of gas. We don't have enough money. We've harmed the one we love. We've lost control.

This is in contrast to Thank God I'm not like those people. Get a load of that one, over there. There but the grace of God, go I.

Do we say those things? Or do we think them?

When I was a teenager, we called groups in high school cliques. There were the jocks, who wore football jerseys. There were the nerds, who in our day had whiz-bang Texas Instrument calculators. And there were the bandies, who hung out in the band room. And if you were not in

a clique, you were probably a loser. Cliques in their best sense give you a place to belong. But at their worst, those in them spend an inordinate amount of time and energy spewing venom on those on the outside.

Kyrie

The musical score is written in a single system with three staves. The first staff is labeled 'Leader' and the second 'Assembly'. The music is in a simple, rhythmic style with a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The lyrics are: 'Lord, have mer - cy. Lord, have mer - cy. Christ, have mer - cy. Christ, have mer - cy. Lord, have mer - cy. Lord, have mer - cy.'

Music: Plainsong

We know that in the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector that we want to be like the tax collector. We treat the Pharisee as some kind of fop, a pompous blowhard that puffs himself up and has no clue how ridiculous he looks.

Unless we had a mirror and we look at it and saw a Pharisee.

Unless we understood as did the original listeners that Pharisees were the righteous ones, the ones after which to model virtue and religious practices that established a respectable place in the community and synagogue.

Then when Jesus starts by introducing two men, a Pharisee and a tax collector, we would instead cheer for the Pharisee and boo for the tax collector.

We would vote for the Pharisee. We would laugh with derision at the tax collector.

Because most of us here have a place in the church, if not an actual pew. Most of us are well enough off that troubles are somebody else's business. At least that's what we'd like others to think.

At least that seems to be a peculiarly insidious American value: success, often at the expense of others. When we introduce ourselves to each other, don't we value our loving family, our agreeable work, our nice neighborhood, our great church?

Jesus puts this all under a microscope in his little vignette about the good Pharisee (the Pharisee, why, he could be a pastor!) and the slimy little tax collector (he and his ilk collaborated with the government, dirty rotten loser). The Pharisee was in the front of the church, wearing the prayer shawl, eyes and hands held heavenward while reciting the Shema, as was his regular custom, ready to contribute one-tenth because God knows no one else did. The tax collector was balled

up in the back knowing he was a fish out of water, not used to church, not knowing the confession by heart, but kind of making it up. Mercy! Help me!

And in this picture, the tax collector was exposing himself. And in this picture, the Pharisee was covering up. And in Jesus' conclusion, we discover that it is when are wholly and utterly exposed, that we know the luxurious and ample embrace of God.

Prayer in the end is relying entirely on God, which is really hard to do. It is really and truly being laid out, and laying it out before the one who is bigger and mysterious and holy and who knows everything about us.

Kathleen Norris ponders the significance of prayer when she reports that *sometimes people will say things like, "Your prayers didn't work, but thanks," as if a person could be praying for only one thing. A miracle. A cure. But in the hardest situations, all one can do is to ask for God's mercy. Let my friend die at home, Lord, and not in the hospital. Let her go quickly, God, and with her loved ones present.*

She continues

One Benedictine friend, a gentle, thoughtful man who has been in constant physical pain for years and is now confined to a wheelchair, says of prayer, "Often, all I can do is to ask god, 'Lord, what is it you want of me?'" From him I have learned that prayer is not asking for what you think you want but asking to be changed in ways you can't imagine. –from Amazing Grace: A Vocabulary of Grace (New York: Riverhead Books © 1998), p 60

Our mission, should we choose to accept it, is to get out of the boxes we have constructed for ourselves and be with those who are also outside. It can be scary. It can be lonely. It can feel like we've lost everything. And there we may just discover a new way of seeing ourselves, while exposed, being clothed finally in the righteousness of God, who loved us while we dead in sin, and made us alive in Christ. Mercy!

Kyrie

The image shows a musical score for a Kyrie. It consists of three staves of music, each with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The first staff is labeled 'Leader' and the second and third are labeled 'Assembly'. The lyrics are: 'Lord, have mer - cy. Lord, have mer - cy.' on the first staff; 'Christ, have mer - cy. Christ, have mer - cy.' on the second staff; and 'Lord, have mer - cy. Lord, have mer - cy.' on the third staff. The music is a simple plainsong style with a steady rhythm.

Music: Plainsong