

Dear Friends in Christ,

How would you picture mercy? On the WELS Facebook page there were these pictures. (Picture of Houston Christians getting ready to work. Picture of supplies gathered in a fellowship hall. Picture of man with wheel barrow doing clean up.)

People from our sister congregations in Houston joined forces with a WELS relief team and went down to Edna and Victoria this holiday weekend to help people and to work on the clean up. They do this in connection with our sister churches in the flooded areas. It isn't too difficult to understand why this happening. It has to do with mercy. We love God and so we love others around us.

What is more difficult to understand is Jesus' manner of showing mercy in Matthew 15. At first he doesn't seem to care, then he seems to stall and finally he performs a miracle. Jesus not only helps this woman, but he leaves a lasting impression for the people around him and for you and me. From this event we are reminded that **The Lord Provides Mercy for All**. What we learn is encouragement to us and to others.

1. Mercy for Jews

Jesus' disciples and the Jewish people are the main focus of his work and teaching. Not in this Bible event. However, we can't appreciate what Jesus does for the main character if we don't remember Lord's promised mercy for the Jews. God's mercy is for all and that includes the Jews.

A. It is ironic that his woman calls Jesus the “Son of David.” She was doing something that many Jews were reluctant to do.

1. Jesus left area around Capernaum. He is way up north in Palestine. He has retreated north for a number of reasons. One is that he had just had a bitter confrontation with the Jewish religious leaders who rejected the idea that he could be the Messiah. Jesus also left the area because after he fed the 5000 and the common people wanted to make him a “bread king.” (Jn 6:14,15) The irony is that this woman who is not of God's people, the Jews, looks on him as the Messiah or Savior.

2. The Jews popularly referred to the Messiah as the Son of David. In chapter one of Luke's gospel, the angel Gabriel tells Mary that her son Jesus,

will sit on David's throne and establish it forever. According to the angel Jesus is the promised Messiah. (Luke 1:32,33)

We see Jesus establishing his throne when he battles Satan's temptations and wins. He also suffers and dies at the cross for the sins of the people. He died even for the sins of the people who rejected him and his purpose. God's mercy is for all people. Jesus reminds us in John 3:16, **"God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."**

B. As Matthew writes down this event, he mentions the actions of the disciples. What we are reminded is the Son of David came also for the Jews who believed in him.

1. Jesus' disciples believed in him as the Savior. However, they were not without sin. It seems that their motivation for helping her is to get rid of her. There were many other sins the disciples were guilty of even though they were on the surface good people. They needed saving too.

2. Jesus came for these men who were waiting for the promised Savior. Jesus would suffer and die for Peter, James, John and the rest. They would find peace and forgiveness for their sins in Jesus' body and blood. Jesus' mercy is for all. That includes those who are his followers.

C. Jesus once made the comment, **"Whoever has been forgiven little loves little."** (Luke 7:47)

1. Do you find yourself like Jesus' disciples, being impatient and unloving? Was there a time in your life when you had little time for God or his church? We are like the disciples who were people of faith and there may be a time in our lives where we are like the Jews and have little love for God. When these things are true we need to repent of our unloving ways.

2. We also need to understand and believe that we have been forgiven much and we therefore have the capacity to love and forgive much, that is to show great mercy.

When you think of Jesus what is the first word that comes to mind? Isn't usually "love." Jesus' love for us is merciful. We don't deserve to be forgiven, but in mercy Jesus took a lifetime of our sins to the cross and paid for them in full. When you cry out with your troubles, when you beg him for help, doesn't he answer and help you? Yes, it is amazing mercy that is at the heart of his response. He did not push his sinful disciples away, but he embraced them and helped them. He does the same today for you and me. This mercy of Jesus in our life enables us to be merciful to others.

2. Mercy for Gentiles

The spotlight in this encounter does not shine on the disciples, but on a woman. What we know is that she is a native Canaanite, which means she is not a Jew, but a Gentile. Here we see Jesus also has mercy for Gentiles.

A. It may not seem like it, but Jesus cared about this woman's faith.

1. This woman's faith is evident from her coming to Jesus. He was keeping a low profile according to St. Mark's Gospel. She does not give up until she finds him in the house where he has retreated with his disciples. She came to Jesus because she knew about him. News of his miracles and his teaching spread far and wide.

By calling him "Son of David" she was expressing her belief that he was the promised Savior. She does not just do this to get help from Jesus, but she has real faith that he has come to take away her sins and make her right with God. She believed in the promise of eternal life. She may not have understood all the details, but she looked to him as a merciful Savior.

2. Why didn't Jesus simply help her? You know that things that come easily in life may soon be forgotten. Jesus wants to make an unforgettable impression on her so she continues to come to him for answers to life's troubles. He accomplishes his goal by stretching out his encounter with her and making her wrestle with him in prayer. Remember that the Lord taught the patriarch Jacob to wrestle with him in prayer.

We might think, "*What if she had given up?*" Jesus knew her and knew the power of the Holy Spirit helping her. He doesn't risk her faith, but makes it bold and strong. Jesus is exercising her faith. She learns a valuable lesson. She learns not to give up praying and trusting.

Jesus is successful as we hear him say, "**Woman, you have great faith.**"

B. We also see that Jesus cared about the woman's daughter who was captive to Satan. When he is done exercising her faith, he informs her that her request has been answered. Her daughtered has been released from the power of the evil spirit.

The healing is not an isolated incident. In Matthew 8:16 we are told that Jesus had healed many including those who were demon possessed. This should not surprise us. **Jesus is almighty** along with the Father and the Holy Spirit. **Nothing is impossible with God.** Jesus had just demonstrated it by feeding over 5000 in the wilderness and before that he had raised a little girl from the dead. God, the Holy Spirit, shows us these things in Scripture and gives us faith to believe. Nothing is impossible with God.

C. The Lord's mercy for other people is large.

We need to look for and expect faith to appear in unusual places. The word of God works and faith appears in prisons, among foreigners, among former cult members, even among for atheists and agnostics. The Lord may use us to plant the word, to be a witness to faith or to encourage faith. If you are a Christian, you are in the "faith business". The Lord wants you to believe that he is bringing people to faith. We plant. We nurture. We harvest.

We do need to ask the Lord to forgive us for not being merciful. You and I have to regularly go to the cross and see God's tremendous mercy for you and me. Filled with his love we can show mercy and compassion for others, including those under the power of the devil. We can pray, we can listen, we can witness and encourage. We do whatever the Lord wants us to do, but we do it because we love mercy and we know others will love it too.

Conclusion: We can be thankful that the Lord is answering our prayers concerning relief efforts for those suffering from the effects of the hurricane and storm conditions in Texas, Louisiana, etc. He has mercifully allowed our church body to participate.

Most of us cannot travel to far off places to help out with disaster relief in person. We can support the effort with our offerings and prayers. We can also show mercy to the people in our lives.

The only way we can do that is to understand the mercy of Christ for us and for all people. In Matthew 15 we see that Jesus cares and he wants to help. We see what he did on Good Friday at the cross and on Easter Sunday at the tomb. As we wait patiently we see his overflowing mercy in our lives. For his sake and with his help we show mercy to others. We do this knowing that God provides mercy for all. Amen.

Isaiah 56:1,6-8 (NIV 2011) *Faith focused on what the Lord is doing and the worldwide mission of the church to bring eternal peace to suffering souls.*

1 This is what the Lord says: “Maintain justice and do what is right, or my salvation is close at hand and my righteousness will soon be revealed.

6 And foreigners who bind themselves to the Lord

to minister to him,

to love the name of the Lord,

and to be his servants,

all who keep the Sabbath without desecrating it

and who hold fast to my covenant—

7 these I will bring to my holy mountain

and give them joy in my house of prayer.

Their burnt offerings and sacrifices

will be accepted on my altar;

for my house will be called

a house of prayer for all nations.”

8 The Sovereign Lord declares—

he who gathers the exiles of Israel:

“I will gather still others to them

besides those already gathered.”

Joshua 2:8-21 (NIV 2011)

The Lord shows mercy for Rahab, the Canaanite prostitute.

8 Before the spies lay down for the night, she went up on the roof 9 and said to them, “I know that the Lord has given you this land and that a great fear of you has fallen on us, so that all who live in this country are melting in fear because of you. 10 We have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to Sihon and Og, the two kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan, whom you completely destroyed. 11 When

we heard of it, our hearts melted in fear and everyone's courage failed because of you, for the Lord your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below.

12 "Now then, please swear to me by the Lord that you will show kindness to my family, because I have shown kindness to you. Give me a sure sign 13 that you will spare the lives of my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them—and that you will save us from death."

14 "Our lives for your lives!" the men assured her. "If you don't tell what we are doing, we will treat you kindly and faithfully when the Lord gives us the land."

15 So she let them down by a rope through the window, for the house she lived in was part of the city wall. 16 She said to them, "Go to the hills so the pursuers will not find you. Hide yourselves there three days until they return, and then go on your way."

17 Now the men had said to her, "This oath you made us swear will not be binding on us 18 unless, when we enter the land, you have tied this scarlet cord in the window through which you let us down, and unless you have brought your father and mother, your brothers and all your family into your house. 19 If any of them go outside your house into the street, their blood will be on their own heads; we will not be responsible. As for those who are in the house with you, their blood will be on our head if a hand is laid on them. 20 But if you tell what we are doing, we will be released from the oath you made us swear."

21 "Agreed," she replied. "Let it be as you say."

So she sent them away, and they departed. And she tied the scarlet cord in the window.

PSALM 133-134 *Please turn to page 115 in the red hymnal.*

NEW TESTAMENT LESSON - Romans 11:13-15, 28-32 (NIV 2011)

I am talking to you Gentiles. In as much as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I take pride in my ministry 14 in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them. 15 For if their rejection brought reconciliation to the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?

As far as the gospel is concerned, they are enemies for your sake; but as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs, 29 for God's gifts and his call are irrevocable. 30 Just as you who were at one time disobedient to God have now received mercy as a result of their disobedience, 31 so they too have now become disobedient in order that they too may now[d] receive mercy as a result of God's mercy to you. 32 For God has bound everyone over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all.

THE GOSPEL READING - Matthew 15:21-28 (NIV 2011)

Jesus marvels at the effect God's mercy has had on a Canaanite woman. He shows further mercy by healing her daughter.

Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. 22 A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is demon-possessed and suffering terribly."

23 Jesus did not answer a word. So his disciples came to him and urged him, "Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us."

24 He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel."

25 The woman came and knelt before him. "Lord, help me!" she said.

26 He replied, "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs."

27 "Yes it is, Lord," she said. "Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table."

28 Then Jesus said to her, "Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted." And her daughter was healed at that moment.