MEDITATION 45

Mark 5: 18-20

18 As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed by demons begged him
that he might be with him. **19** But Jesus refused and said to him, "Go home to your own people,
and tell them how much the Lord has done for you and what mercy he has shown you." **20** And
he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him, and
everyone was amazed.

Two things strike me in particular as I have read and reread these verses prayerfully.
First, the man who is healed of his inner torment pleads with Jesus, that Jesus allow him to "be with him." Why does he want to be with Jesus? Hasn't Jesus healed him and given him a new chance at living his life without constantly being tormented by his memories and losses? And yet, beyond the healing, he is seeking proximity with Jesus in an ongoing way. What's that about?

Second, Jesus tells him, rather, to go and tell people how much "the Lord" has done for him and what "mercy" he has shown him. Is it the quality of mercy that draws the man to Jesus well beyond how he has been healed?

People can do all kinds of things for us and we can do all kinds of things for other people. But how much is mercy a part of what we do or what's been done to us?... Well, but mercy is not a word we use as often as words like compassion, kindness, or forgiveness. What is mercy all about?

Looking up various definitions of mercy as a word in comparison to other similar words, I came upon a little article that compared mercy to grace. The basic point of the article is this: mercy is withholding a negative whereas grace is giving a positive. Mercy is not receiving a punishment you deserve whereas grace is giving a gift, a favour or a blessing that is unearned or undeserved.

But this is too narrow of a definition of mercy as understood in the original Greek that is our gospel reading. The word mercy (*eleos*) has the feeling of being released from something that has gripped you or even imprisoned you. Mercy is a healing word. It is about offering someone a way out who is caught in some misery, guilt, shame, suffering or destitution. Mercy is about forgiving a debt of something owed, freeing someone caught in a trap, or letting go a misdeed. Mercy is also an opening of one's heart toward someone in a way that invites them to let go and let be in humble gratitude as response.

How much is mercy a part of your life? How much is mercy in experience in your life? When have you been shown mercy when you needed it? When have you shown mercy when someone else has needed it? And when have you been merciful, but the other person to whom mercy

was shown was not ready to receive it because they were not ready to acknowledge how much they needed it?

How much is mercy a part of your life? How much is mercy in your heart's core, releasing you as much as anyone else who needs to experience it from you? How much would mercy help you be more empathetic and less judgemental, more open to understanding and making space for imperfection and mistakes, and less condemning someone because they should know better and do better?

It's not easy to find the right way when it comes to mercy and judgement. But even when we have to make judgements and take a stand, may we never lose mercy at the core of our being. The man in our story wanted to be close to Jesus because of the quality of mercy in Jesus. What about you?

PRAYER: Thank you, O God, for mercy shown, felt and lived out…
Help me, O God, when mercy is hard because the hurt, the anger, the frustration and the impatience have taken hold deep in me…
Give me more mercy with others and more mercy with myself too…
Help me release the hold of offense in my heart…
Help me be freed of my self-righteousness when I think of myself in relation to someone else who has fallen short…
Help me engage a wrong or an injustice with grace because mercy lives in my heart…
And help me be free to shed tears for the suffering in the world because mercy flows through me…
In Jesus' name… Amen.