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Pentecost II
June 22, 2025
Text: Luke 8:26 – 39
Title: Talk About Mercy

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. To begin with today's sermon, I'd like for you to consider the following three scenarios with me. The first one finds you dealing with one of your children. He has never been an easy child, and that's putting it mildly. He's always had a streak of defiance in him, and as he's gotten older, it has gotten worse and worse. It's the type of situation that has your closest friends feeling genuine pity for your situation. Nothing that you do seems to have an effect on him.

Then one night, shortly after his seventeenth birthday, the phone rings. It's about 10:30, and you grumble to yourself as you pick up the phone. If this is work calling, you're not going to be happy at all, but the voice that you hear on the other end of the line isn't your boss. It's your son. "Hi...uh...could you come down to the police station? I've been arrested." You close your eyes, and take a deep breath so that you don't explode. The worst part is that you're not really surprised.

"What did they arrest you for?" you calmly manage to ask.

"Shoplifting, from Wal-mart," he says. You know that Wal-mart typically just takes the stuff back, and lets kids go with a stern warning. Then you hear another voice in the background asking for the phone. "This is officer Mullin. I'm afraid it's a little more serious than simple shoplifting. Your son was caught with enough to qualify as a felony."

#2. You're driving to town on a typical Wednesday evening. The grocery shopping has been put off long enough, and there are several things that you need to stock up on because there's company coming for the weekend. As you drive along you notice that it's time to fill up

the gas tank too. You make it into town, and you stop for a red light. You decide to get gas at the Kwik Trip because they carry a couple of items on your shopping list for a little less money. You listen to the radio as you wait for the light to turn green, and you hit the gas when it does. You never saw the other driver who ran the red-light as she was answering her cell phone, but the impact sent you into the oncoming traffic to hit a white F150 head-on. The last thing you see before passing out is the airbag deploying in your face.

#3. You and your family come home after taking advantage of a long weekend to get away. Not even your neighbors knew that you were leaving until they saw you drive away. You've had a great time, but now it's back to reality with work and school the next morning. You pull the car into the garage, and grab a few pieces of garbage as you head into the house. The sight that greets you stops you dead in your tracks. The living room is torn apart, and the new TV is missing from its spot. "We've been robbed!" your spouse exclaims, and that's when there's a knock on your front door. Your neighbor, Jerry, is there, and he says, "We didn't know when you'd be back, but I hurried over as soon as I realized you were here. I know it looks bad, but they caught the guys in the act. Julie saw them go into the house, and she called 911. The police got there just as they were carrying your new TV out the front door. It was lucky for you that the patrol car was a block away when she called! You have to go to the police station, and ask for Sgt. Dicus to file the complaint and press charges."

Three very different scenarios, but today for all of them I want you to consider this question. Would you show mercy? Could you be merciful to the thieves? The other driver? To your son? For that matter, do any of these situations contain anyone who even has the right to ask you? It would really be pretty galling from any of them except maybe your son. The injuries from the imaginary accident would probably be pretty serious with the impacts of all three

vehicles. The thieves had violated your home and destroyed any sense of security that you previously had, not to mention the attempt to take all of your stuff. If they came to you asking that you not have them prosecuted, would you even listen to them much less consider it? Speaking for myself, I have serious doubts that I would even hear what the crooks had to say.

Now, as you think of what you might do in each of these three scenarios, consider today's Gospel lesson again. Jesus has just finished a journey across the Sea of Galilee that involved a pretty nasty storm disturbing his sleep. The disciples woke Him up because they were terrified even though many of them were professional fishermen who had spent most of their lives on that water. Jesus simply spoke to the weather as He would a person, and He commanded the wind and the waves to be calm and the storm was over just like that.

They arrive in the country of the Gerasenes which was probably to the south of the Sea of Galilee, and as they get out of the boat, Jesus is met by, "...a man from the city who had demons." He is stark naked, and has been living in the tombs outside of the city for a long time. This is certainly a unique welcome. Just imagine the odor that probably clung to him from the corpses that he slept among. As soon as this man sees Jesus, he drops to the dirt in front of Him, and cries out, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me."

There's the connection to the three scenarios that I began with. The demons who possess this man are the utter and sworn enemies of God. There is no question that they have wronged the Lord in the past, and what is their reaction to the sight of Jesus? They beg for His mercy! These things are without any hint of mercy for the poor man they are tormenting. Luke tells us that in addition to his foul living conditions, the man is regularly seized in a violent way, and even attempts to bind him with chains and shackles have been futile because the demons are able

to force him to break through. Luke tells us they have tortured him mercilessly for a long time, and yet here these demons are with the utter gall to beg for what they refuse to give, mercy!

It's a scary thought, being possessed by demons, but a thought that's just as scary is that we can very easily act like them. Go back to the three scenarios at the beginning of today's sermon. If the thieves were able to come to you and ask for your forgiveness, would you give it to them? We pray constantly in the Lord's Prayer that He would forgive our sins as we forgive the sins that are committed against us. We say that we'll forgive, but do we really mean it? Let's not even make the case as serious as one of those scenarios. If someone hurts you by talking behind your back, do you let it go, or do you hold a grudge when you find out about it? By the world's standards, you're perfectly within your rights to hold the grudge and even to seek revenge for the wrong, but are you willing to forgive as God has forgiven you in all things? You and I beg God for the forgiveness of our sins even when we are all too often incapable or simply unwilling to even consider forgiving those around us.

Forgiving those who have wronged us is such a foreign concept today that it actually makes news when it happens. People are much more likely to respond in some way that attempts to get back at the person who wronged them than they are to forgive them. Your neighbor doesn't say hello to you in the store even when you know that she looked your way. Instead of assuming that she had other things on her mind you think she means it as a slight. Well, you'll just be sure to ignore her the next time that you see her, and see how much she likes it. This is just one of the petty things that we do with people. There are far more serious situations that we find ourselves in, but our nature makes almost all of them the same. We fail to show the love and mercy that God asks us to show.

Fortunately for all of us, Jesus views things quite differently. The man possessed was a Gentile who wasn't even part of Israel, and He received the Lord's mercy when the demons were cast out. And as if that weren't enough, Luke shows us that in His divine mercy Jesus actually granted the request of the demons too! He didn't annihilate them or send them into the abyss that they were so terrified of, although that definitely would have been His right. Instead, He mercifully granted the unclean spirits a second request by allowing them to possess a herd of unclean animals. They entered the pigs, and immediately killed them by racing them into the water. How's that for mercy? Jesus even showed the demons, His bitter enemies, a level of mercy that they certainly had no right to even ask for, and if He were willing to do that for them how much more mercy will He show to you?

His love and mercy go far beyond anything else that we experience here on earth. It's more than enough to grant forgiveness for any and every sin that you've ever committed. His mercy is given to you in spite of the fact that you have done nothing to deserve it, and in spite of the fact that you really have no right to even ask for it. It is the best gift you'll ever receive.

The man who was freed of the demons wanted nothing more than to stay with Jesus when the people of the area begged Him to leave. But Jesus charged him to remain behind, and to spread the Good News of what the Lord had done for him. And that's exactly what the man did.

The Lord asks each of us to respond to His mercy in the same way. There are many wonderful blessings that God has given to each one of us, and in addition to thanking Him, He only asks that we tell the people around us about His forgiveness and mercy. It's a small response for the incredible gift of mercy that He has given to us all. Amen. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.