



MERCY
GLOBAL
PRESENCE

Introduction: Mercying

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We come to the third month of the last Segment of this Mercy Global Presence process. This Segment integrates the twelve themes from the first three Segments. In this segment's theme, we continue weaving new patterns of mercying.

Before we begin our reflections on mercying, let us summarize the richness of what we heard in our previous theme, "compassionate heart." In the introduction, we heard that the most frequent phrase in the Gospels is "Jesus was moved with compassion." Our theologian this month, Carmel McDonough rsm, gave us a real-life example when she showed the response of parents whose children were tragically killed, "No less than two days after the accident, Leila Abdullah and her husband Danny, at the site where their children's lives had ended so abruptly, opened their hearts to the driver who by his self-destructive actions had wiped out half their family. While dealing with their unimaginable and unfathomable loss, Danny and Leila chose to forgive Samuel Davidson."

Our artist this past month was a poet, Larretta Rivera-Williams rsm, who spoke as only a poet can:

If I were a mirror I would want to reflect...
The compassionate heart; the God within
If I were a mirror I would be
a reflection of a compassionate heart
Wrapping around the you looking untiringly at me.

Steph Langley, on the occasion of the 160th Anniversary of All Hallows' School in Brisbane, wrote the founder of the School, "Oh, Mother Vincent Whitty, I wish you could see our girls today. As a student body, they are fierce in their pursuit for Justice. Only today, I heard two of our students call on a sea of their peers to speak out about the treatment of women in society and to make it known that they will not stand for violence against women. The cheers of response from the audience must tell you that they stand united in this, still, all these years later, as you and your Sisters did."

Julia Morisi chose an image from Catherine to find sense in this challenging time, "The winds, the earthquakes, and the fires of our world do indeed render compassion a gentle and soft whisper sometimes. . . In the midst of global conflicts, wars, disasters, and inequalities, the spirit of Mercy is rooted in simple hospitality: a comfortable cup of tea. And yet, this tender act is a force to reckon with. In the simplest and humblest act is where true power lies, and many whispers can become a chorus."

In a moving video, Richard Kerr-Bell, as a distinct voice, spoke about compassion in Maori belief, "Pa Henare Tate, Fr Henare Tate mihi atu koe e pa – who has since passed, spoke of *aroha* or love and compassion as being in the presence of the breath of God. A compassionate heart, and in Māori belief, *aroha*, happens in the presence of people with the presence of the spirit."

Sandra Lupi rsm prepared the reflective prayer, centered on the heartbeat of God, "Can you hear the heartbeat? Those words resonate deep within. It is a question we all need to ask – and answer. How do you hear a heartbeat? How do we hear God's heartbeat? The image of the apostle John leaning on the breast of Jesus reminds us that we are like the beloved disciple called

to have our heads on Jesus' breast to hear his heartbeat and from there look out at the world." She quoted the words of Henri Nouwen, "I have to kneel before the Father, put my ear against his chest and listen, without interruption to the heartbeat of God. Then, and only then, can I say carefully and very gently what I hear."

Mercying

As we have for the first two themes in this segment, we will look to the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10, to see "mercying" in action, "He [the Samaritan] went to him [the injured man] and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him" (Lk 10:34).

The word "mercying" is a new word in English to express our growing understanding of what living mercy means in this new time. It comes from Pope Francis' papal motto, *Miserando atque Eligendo* (*By Having Mercy and by Choosing*) which comes from the writings of Bede the Venerable. In explaining the word, Pope Francis said, "I think the Latin gerund *miserando* is impossible to translate in both Italian and Spanish. I like to translate it with another gerund that does not exist in Spanish: *misericiando* ("mercy-ing"). The Pope's words come from an Interview with Antonio Spadaro sj for *America* (September 2013).

Each person, who is hearing or reading this reflection, has committed their life to mercying. It is, therefore, challenging to find a new way to frame our reflection. I am going to use, as a guide, the words from the prophet Micah, "What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness (*hesed*), and to walk humbly with your God?" (Mic 6:8). A foundational pillar of mercying is found in the Hindu tradition. The Sanskrit word for mercy is दया (*daya*), in its literal meaning, "Suffering in the suffering of all beings."

To Do Justice ~ To Act Justly

The first requirement for what God asks in Micah is "to do justice or to act justly." The Hebrew word for justice, *mishpat*, is used more than 200 times in the Old Testament. It can mean retributive justice or restorative justice. It is the latter meaning most often used, giving people their due or right, seeking out the vulnerable and helping them.

God speaks of justice to the land in Deuteronomy before the land is given to the people, "The land that you are crossing over to occupy is a land of hills and valleys, watered by rain from the sky, a land that the Lord your God looks after. The eyes of the Lord your God are always on it, from the beginning of the year to the end of the year" (Deut 11:11-12). In his *Cry of Earth, Cry of the Poor*, Leonardo Boff, referring to God's first covenant with Earth found in Genesis 9, speaks of justice to Earth and Earth beings, "Human beings must feel that they are sons and daughters of the rainbow, those who translate this divine covenant with all the beings existing and living, with new relationships of kindness, compassion, cosmic solidarity, and deep reverence for the mystery that each one bears and reveals."

A summary statement on doing justice for people is found in Psalm 146:6-9, naming those who are hungry, prisoners, people ill or bowed down, strangers, orphans, and widows:

Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord their God,
who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them;
who keeps faith forever; who executes justice for the oppressed;

who gives food to the hungry.
The Lord sets the prisoners free; the Lord opens the eyes of the blind.
The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down; the Lord loves the righteous.
The Lord watches over the strangers and upholds the orphan and the widow,
but the way of the wicked the Lord brings to ruin.

There is often debate about the relationship between justice and mercy. Janet Ruffing rsm says it simply, “Mercy is justice in tears.” In his wonderful book entitled *Mercy*, Cardinal Kasper concludes, “Mercy does not abolish justice but fulfills it and exceeds it. Thomas can even say: justice without mercy is cruelty; mercy without justice is the mother of disintegration; therefore, both must be bound together.” Kath Rushton rsm echoes this understanding, “Mercy takes us to the root causes of suffering and injustice, to the works of justice.” In his preparation for the Year of Mercy (2016), Pope Francis takes the final step in exploring the relationship, “God does not deny justice but rather envelopes it and surpasses it with an even greater event in which we experience love as the foundation of true justice. . . . God’s justice is God’s mercy given to everyone as a grace that flows from the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.”

To Love Kindness (*Hesed*)

The second component of God’s direction in Micah is translated as “to love kindness,” although the Hebrew word translated as kindness is *hesed*, a word often translated as “mercy.” *Hesed* is used more than 300 times in the Old Testament and refers almost always to God’s action rather than the action of people. The theologian, Wendy Farley, describes mercy as “a mode of relationship and a power that is wounded by the suffering of others and propelled to action on their behalf now.” James Keenan sj echoes this sense, “Mercy is the willingness to enter into the chaos of others.”

Catherine McAuley gives good advice in speaking about showing loving kindness to those with whom we live every day, “Our charity is to be cordial. Now cordial signifies something that renews, invigorates, and warms. Such should be the effect of our love for each other.”

Far too often, disappointed in our own frailty and vulnerability, the person whom we fail to show loving kindness is ourselves. In 2 Corinthians, Paul tells us, “God said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.’ So, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me” (2 Cor 12:9). In our time and from another faith tradition, the Buddhist teacher, Pema Chödrön, repeats the same message, “Compassion is not a relationship between the healer and the wounded. It is a relationship between equals. Only when we know our own darkness well can we be present with the darkness of others. Compassion becomes real when we recognize our shared humanity.”

Just as God calls us to show justice to Earth, so, too, God calls us to show mercy for Earth, “The Lord spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai, saying: Speak to the people of Israel and say to them: When you enter the land that I am giving you, the land shall observe a sabbath for the Lord. For six years you shall sow your field, and for six years you shall prune your vineyard, and gather in their yield; but in the seventh year there shall be a sabbath of complete rest for the land, a sabbath for the Lord” (Lev 25:1-3).

To Walk Humbly with Your God

Walking with God is a moving metaphor used in both the Old and New Testament. In the first instance, it is an invitation from God. In the second creation story in Genesis, we read, almost in

tears, “They heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze . . . God said, “Where are you?” (Gen 3:8-9). In Leviticus, we hear God’s own promise, “I will walk among you, and will be your God, and you shall be my people” (Lev 26:12). Jesus echoes the same promise in the Gospel of John, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life” (Jn 8:12).

The Jewish teacher, Erica Brown, reminds us that God’s willingness to walk with us is a strong message to see in this invitation our own promise to walk with others in their pain and suffering, “To return to a state of simplicity, broken in God’s presence, able, in a state of vulnerability, to make those invisible visible, to create a society where we walk beside others because God is willing to walk beside us.”

Sometimes, the metaphor is used of our walking with God. God gives Levi highest praise, “He walked with me in integrity and uprightness” (Mal 2:6). The psalms use the lovely image of light in speaking of our walking in God’s presence. “For you have delivered my soul from death, and my feet from falling, so that I may walk before God in the light of life.” (Ps 56:13). Again, we hear, “Happy are the people who know the festal shout, who walk, O Lord, in the light of your countenance” (Ps 89:15).

Most often, the metaphor speaks of walking in the way of our God. In Deuteronomy, we read, “Keep the commandments of the Lord your God, by walking in God’s ways and by fearing God” (Deut 8:6). The same theme is repeated in the New Testament, “Whoever says, ‘I abide in Jesus’, ought to walk just as he walked” (1 Jn 2:6). Catherine McAuley echoes the metaphor in her beautiful expression, “What an ineffable consolation to serve Christ Himself, in the person of the poor, and to walk in the very same path He trod!”

A spiritual writer, Jan Richardson, from our own time, deepens the metaphor in her prayer-poem:

May the path that Christ walks
to bring justice upon the earth,
to bring light to those who sit in darkness,
to bring out those who live in bondage,
to bring new things to all creation:
may this path run through our life.
May we be the road Christ takes.

A Final Reflection on Mercying

Perhaps the most explicit statement that we have in our Scriptures on “mercying” is found in Jesus’ parable in Matthew 25. In his new work of mercy – “care for our common home,” Pope Francis adds one more dimension:

I was hungry, and you gave me food,
I was thirsty, and you gave me something to drink,
I was a stranger, and you welcomed me,
I was naked, and you gave me clothing,
I was sick, and you took care of me,
I was in prison, and you visited me. (Matt 25:35-36)
I was Earth broken and abused, and you cared for me.

I invite you to take time in that place where you and God relate best and reflect on this parable. I invite you to see yourself as “I” in each of the seven statements, each one a moment of mercying. In this act of contemplation, you are living and breathing mercying. Perhaps you will be led to express the wisdom which emerges in a work of art – a poem or hymn or painting or weaving or . . .

Let us continue now to create our mercy weaving as we hear many diverse voices and see many expressions of our theme of mercying..