

Mercy, the Enduring and Liberating Love of our Womb-Compassionate God

-Veronica Lawson RSM

I acknowledge with deep gratitude the first peoples of this land, the Jaggera people, and all the mercy and compassion they have brought to the land and all that inhabits the land. I acknowledge the place they have in the life of this community.

I turn first to a little poem by Denise Levertov. It goes like this: “It was the way they climbed the steps they appeared bit by bit yet swiftly-the tops of their hats then their faces looking in as they reached the top step by the door, then as I flung open the door, their dear corporeal selves, first him, then her. It was the simultaneously swift and gradual advent of such mercy after I had been wounded....their complete comforting embrace...”¹ Levertov’s poem “Enduring Love” celebrates the healing power of a loving visitation that mediated mercy and touched the subject of the poem, possibly herself, at the core of her wounded being. It captures in a wonderfully whimsical way both Hebrew and Greek concepts that tell of the enduring love and womb-compassionate mercy of our God. To these concepts at the heart of our sacred story we will return.

The first time I dared to speak of a theology of mercy or more precisely of the mercy of God was in Brisbane during the first week of May 1976. At that time, religious congregations everywhere were responding to the call of *Perfectae Caritatis* to return to the sources and reclaim the charism of their founders. The Brisbane Mercies invited me to lead a retreat on Mercy in the Scriptures. That invitation was, for me, the beginning of an on-going exploration of a pervasive biblical understanding of God as Mercy. I realised very quickly that mercy is a way of life to which all are called, that it transcends the boundaries of religion and denomination, or of religious congregation. At the same time, I realised that Christians are called to live a particular refraction of God’s mercy, in continuity with the Jewish understanding of mercy enshrined in the First Testament, and in tune with the gospel compassion embodied in and proclaimed by Jesus of Nazareth. I was gradually brought to the realisation that all readings of the text are informed by readers’ diverse and divergent experiences, that cultural and social location as well as gender function in our hearing of the word just as they functioned in the production of the text, that the text itself came out of a human-centred and specifically male-centred world and has to be read and proclaimed differently as we become ever more aware of the interdependence of all that is.

While my own concern for ecological justice was awakened in the early 1970s, it was not until the first publication in the Earth Bible series in 2000 that I began, in any conscious way, to bring that

¹ Denise Levertov, Enduring Love in *This Great Unknowing: Last Poems* (New York: New Directions, 1999), 52.

ecological filter to my interpretation of our sacred Story.² My reading of the sacred text has been immeasurably enriched by the work of the Earth Bible Project. This exploration of mercy in the bible is informed by the Earth Bible principles of interpretation that respect the kin-ship or inter-relationship of the whole Earth community.³

The Call to Mercy in Our Times

Thus, for me, the call to live mercy was and continues to be grounded in experience, in the distress of the Earth community, human and more-than-human. As we gather in this place, I invite you to focus for a few moments on that pain and distress: on the hunger of the one in five aboriginal children in this country who will not have a meal today; on the plight of asylum seekers on Manus Island and Nauru as well as in the mainland detention centres who look for mercy where there is none; on the alarming loss of biodiversity in our world; on the plight of the Great Barrier reef or the Galilee Basin; on the pollution of our seas and waterways. Such pain informs our theology of mercy and impels us to action, for mercy in our gospel tradition is always action-oriented. The distress of our planet invites us to live mercy and to view Earth's diverse elements as potential agents of mercy.

Inter-texts Informing Mercy in the Gospels

In considering the inter-texts that inform the mercy stories and sayings in the gospels, we turn first to the Hebrew Bible and in particular to Israel's originating story, the Exodus. The Book of Exodus opens with the oft-told tale of the Pharaoh's daughter. When we know a story well we sometimes fail to see or to hear the details that reveal a little more than first meets the eye or the ear. The text tells us of a daughter of Levi, a Hebrew slave woman, who gives birth to a healthy male child and, in contravention of the Pharaoh's edict, draws on earth elements to protect her child. She places him in a papyrus basket plastered with bitumen and pitch and leaves the basket in the reeds by the bank of the river. As the child's sister, another daughter of Levi, waits to see what might happen, the daughter of Pharaoh is said to come to the river to bathe while her attendants walk beside the river. She sees first the basket and then the child. She not only sees but she also hears and responds: "He was crying," says the text, "and she had pity on him" (NRSV translation). "Had pity" is a verbal form in the original Hebrew text. It comes from the verb *hamal* meaning to liberate or spare a captive and also to have compassion.⁴ In Israel's story-telling and song-making tradition, the God of Israel is the

² Norman Habel, ed. *Readings from the Perspective of Earth* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000).

³ See, for example, Norman Habel & Peter Trudinger, eds. *Exploring Ecological Hermeneutics* (Atlanta: SBL, 2008).

⁴ See Veronica Lawson, "The Language of Mercy in the Hebrew Bible." Part I of an unpublished resource for the study of mercy in the bible. This resource has been revised with the assistance of Silver Mountain Bible

one who hears the cry of the distressed, the one who has compassion and mercy. In our story, Israel's foundation story, it is the daughter of the oppressor who sees with the eyes of mercy, hears with the ears of mercy and has compassion on the endangered child. It is she who images the God of liberation and compassion. Her words indicate that she knows exactly what she is doing: in other words, she knowingly saves the child, also in contravention of the Pharaoh's edict. Mercy is a way of being in the world, a way of seeing and of hearing and a way of responding. While Pharaoh's daughter embodies this way of being, other-than-human Earth elements such as the basket, the bitumen, the reeds and the river bank all function as agents of mercy protecting the child from harm. We might spare a thought for the eco-system of the river that protects not only the endangered child but a whole community of other-than-human life.

The story of the daughters of Levi and the daughter of Pharaoh features one of three main Hebrew ways of expressing the notion of mercy. While the verb *ḥamal* and the related noun *ḥemlah* are used elsewhere from time to time, there are two other Hebrew word groups that occur with great frequency: *ḥesed* (noun, meaning steadfast love or loving kindness) and its cognate *ḥasîd* (adjective); and *raḥamîm* (noun, usually translated as mercy or compassion) and its cognates *raḥam* (verb) and *raḥûm* (adjective). Discussion of a fourth related word group, *ḥen* (noun, meaning grace) and its cognates, is beyond the scope of this paper, except for a brief mention in relation to Luke's portrait of Mary of Nazareth. While the notion of mercy in the bible clearly transcends the vocabulary or language of mercy, word usage is nonetheless a helpful starting point for what will hopefully become for us all an on-going reflection, especially in the forth-coming Jubilee Year of Mercy recently announced by Pope Francis.

Steadfast love (*ḥesed*) has connotations of loyalty, fidelity, and constancy.⁵ It is frequently linked with the Hebrew word for fidelity or faithfulness, *'emet*. As is the way with Hebrew poetry, two concepts in juxtaposition reinforce each other. Steadfast love and faithfulness are two refractions of the light that the God of mercy shines on God's whole Earth community. Steadfast love is covenant love. Steadfast or enduring love is often associated with hospitality, denoting right relationship between host and guest. Every faithful Jew and every faith-filled Christian knows that "God's steadfast love endures forever." This reassuring "mercy" refrain is repeated some 130 times in the Psalms alone. It is repeated in every verse of Psalm 136. It is God's *ḥesed* that brought the whole cosmos into being: "O give thanks to our God, who is good, for God's steadfast love (*ḥesed*) endures

Software <http://www.silvermountainsoftware.com> and Accordance Bible Software <http://www.accordancebible.com/>.

⁵See Nelson Glueck, *Hesed in the Bible*, trans. Alfred Gottschalk (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1967), *passim*.

forever. O give thanks to the God of gods, for God's steadfast love endures forever. who alone does great wonders, for God's steadfast love endures forever; who by understanding made the heavens, for God's steadfast love endures forever; who spread out the earth on the waters, for God's steadfast love endures forever; who made the great lights, for God's steadfast love endures forever; the sun to rule over the day, for God's steadfast love endures forever; the moon and stars to rule over the night, for God's steadfast love endures forever....(Ps 136:1-9)."

We might consider all the ways in which God is host to the whole created universe and compose our own psalms or songs in praise of the wonders of a universe that was understood so differently when the Hebrew Bible was composed. The three-tiered ancient cosmogony that informed the Hebrew understanding of God's relationship with the creation has given way to a much more complex and expansive view of the cosmos. Acknowledging with the Psalmist that God's steadfast love brought the whole universe into being, we might consider the extraordinary advances of science as a function of God's steadfast love and so praise the God of *hesed* for gifting our species with the capacity to co-create and to be filled with wonder and awe.

As Psalm 136 continues, it is the *hesed* of God that liberates Israel from slavery. We note with some alarm that even the slaughter of the Egyptians is attributed to the *hesed* of God "who struck Egypt through their firstborn, for God's steadfast love endures forever; and brought Israel out from among them, for God's steadfast love endures forever; with a strong hand and an outstretched arm, for God's steadfast love endures forever; who divided the Red Sea in two, for God's steadfast love endures forever....It is God who remembered us in our low estate, for God's steadfast love endures forever; and rescued us from our foes, for God's steadfast love endures forever....(Ps 136:10-24)." An interpretative stance of empathy or kin-ship with all being invites us to critique the equating of violence and mercy. We might question the inclusion of such texts in our liturgical celebrations.

As the psalm ends, we find that the hospitable God of *hesed* is said to give "food to all flesh, for God's steadfast love endures forever (Ps 136:25)." For the Hebrews, "all flesh" encompassed all living beings, human and other-than-human. God's hospitality is thus predicated on God's mercy, God's *hesed*. It is for all of God's mercy in creation and in history that Israel sings in a final burst in praise of God's enduring love: "O give thanks to the God of heaven, for God's steadfast love endures forever (Ps 136:26)."

When the Hebrew books of the Bible were translated into Greek, *hesed* was rendered in a variety of ways: as *eleos* (mercy), *eleemosunē* (works of mercy or almsgiving), *oiktirmos* (mercy or pity), *charis*

(grace), or even *dikaïosunē* (righteousness) which is generally used to translate the Hebrew *sedeqah* meaning justice in the sense of right relationship. All of these words appear in the books that were originally written in Greek. We can confidently conclude that, for the Greek translators and authors, *hesed* was a richly layered concept carrying within it elements of right relationship, grace, fidelity and pity.

Occurring with less frequency than *hesed*, but with equal power and poignancy is the mercy word *raḥamîm* meaning womb compassion and its cognates *raḥam* and *raḥûm*. For the Israelites, God was a God of *raḥamîm* (womb-compassion) and *hesed* (steadfast love). In Exod 34:6, God is praised as “merciful (*raḥûm*) and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love (*hesed*) and faithfulness (*‘emet*), keeping steadfast love (*hesed*) for the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin....” Graciousness and mercy go hand in hand. Our womb-compassionate God is a God of forgiveness. Steadfast love, womb-compassion, fidelity and forgiveness are God’s mercy-filled way of being in the Earth community. This has been so since the beginning: “Be mindful of your mercy (*raḥamîm*) ...and of your steadfast love (*hesed*) for they have been from of old” (Ps 25:6).

For the Psalmist, *raḥamîm* is God’s gift to offer or withhold and safety resides in God’s *hesed*: “Do not withhold your mercy (*raḥamîm*) from me; let your steadfast love (*hesed*) and your faithfulness (*‘emet*) keep me safe forever” (Ps 40:11). It is by God’s womb-compassion and enduring love that sinners are forgiven: “Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love (*hesed*); according to your abundant mercy (*raḥamîm*) blot out my transgressions” (Ps 51:1); “Answer me, O God, for your steadfast love (*hesed*) is good; according to your abundant mercy (*raḥamîm*), turn to me” (Ps 69:16).

God’s graciousness and womb-compassion are placed in parallel: “Has God forgotten to be gracious? Has God in anger shut up God’s compassion (*raḥamîm*)? (Ps 77:9)” While Israel acknowledges its historical sinfulness, God’s womb compassion can free God’s people from the consequences of their collective sin: “Do not remember against us the iniquities of our ancestors; let your compassion (*raḥamîm*) come speedily to meet us, for we are brought very low” (Ps 79:8); and “God is gracious (*hanûn*) and merciful (*raḥûm*), slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love (*hesed*) (Ps 145:8).” Ps 119:156 suggests an equivalence between God’s mercy and God’s justice when life is at stake: “Great is your mercy (*raḥamîm*), O God; give me life according to your justice (*mishpat*).” God’s womb compassion is all encompassing. Not only does it extend to all that exists: “God’s compassion (*raḥamîm*) is over all that God has made” (Ps 145:9), but the whole universe has the capacity to give

thanks to the God of *raḥamîm*: “All your works shall give thanks to you...and all your faithful shall bless you (Ps 145:10).”

Mercy in the Christian Scriptures

In the Christian Scriptures, Jesus of Nazareth embodies the compassion and mercy of the God of Israel, and the stories of Jesus the Compassionate One are best understood against the backdrop of both Hebrew and Greek scriptures. While there is a very real sense in which “gospel” encompasses the whole of the Christian Scriptures, our reflection in this context will focus only on selected gospel passages from Mark, Matthew and Luke which feature “mercy” language.

Mark: Circles of Mercy

We turn first to the Markan gospel where Jesus is said to be moved with compassion (*esplagchnisthe*) for the crowds because they are like sheep without a shepherd (Mark 6:34//8:2). The analogy of the sheep without a shepherd presupposes a close relationship and interconnection between the human and the other-than-human in the lives of his hearers. It suggests that Jesus’ compassion or mercy for the human community extended to other-than-human Earth creatures. In the verb used here (*splagchnizomai*), we find echoes of the Hebrew *raḥam*, to have the womb compassion of the God of Israel. The Greek verb means literally to be moved in one’s bowels, in the depths of one’s being. It connotes a physical reaction in the face of suffering and anticipates a compassionate and practical response. Jesus has compassion on the crowds and he engages his followers in ensuring that everyone receives a share of the food. The people form circles of mercy and find that there is not only enough for the huge crowd but an abundance of bread left over. Some ancient manuscripts use this same verb in the story of the man with leprosy (Mark 1:40-45). Jesus is said to be moved with compassion (*esplagchnisthe*) when the man makes a plea for healing: “If you choose, you can make me clean” (Mark 1:40). On another occasion, the disciples bring to Jesus a boy who is having convulsions (Mark 9:17-27). The boy’s father implores Jesus to help both him and his son by “compassioning” (*splagchnistheis*) them. The imperative form of the verb “to help” coupled with the participle “compassioning” heightens the sense of desperation in the child’s father. The father’s faith is central to the healing of his son.

A different and more frequently employed verb for mercy (*eleeō*) is found on the lips of Jesus in Mark 5:19 and in the plea of a blind man in 10:47. In the first instance, Jesus attributes the cure of a

possessed man to the mercy of God. In the latter, the blind man's plea for mercy is named as faith, a faith that restores sight and the capacity to engage more fully in life (10:52).

Matthew: The Merciful and the Mercied

When we turn to the gospel of Matthew, we find that all the power of the biblical tradition of mercy is evoked in the beatitude: "Blessed are the merciful (pl. *eleēmōnes*) for they shall be mercied (*eleēthēsontai*)" (5:7). The adjective "merciful" (pl. *eleēmōnes*) is unique in the gospels and is found in only one other place in the Christian scriptures, namely in Hebrews 2:17 where it is used of Jesus as merciful (*eleēmōn*) and faithful high priest.⁶ The passive form (*eleēthēsontai*) of the verb "to mercy" (*eleeō*) is found only here. It invites us to pause and consider what it might mean to be embraced by the womb-compassion and steadfast, liberating love of God. It invites us to reflect on the whole Hebrew bible tapestry of mercy language and life that underpins this beatitude.⁷

Luke: A Wellspring of Mercy

Like Matthew and Mark, Luke also speaks to us through the language of mercy: in the angel's greeting to Mary (1:28); in the songs of Mary (1:46-55) and of Zechariah (1:68-79); in the stories of Elizabeth (1:58), of the bereft woman of the village of Nain (7:1-11), of the ten with leprosy (17:12-13), and of the blind beggar outside Jericho (18:38); in Jesus' stories of the man who fell among the robbers (10:25-37), of the man with two sons (15:1-32), of the rich man and the destitute Lazarus (16:24); in the directives to be merciful as God is merciful (6:36) and to engage in works of mercy (11:41; 12:33). The Jubilee Year of Mercy is also the liturgical year of Luke's gospel and we can expect to encounter some, though not all, of these texts in our Sunday liturgies next year.

The angel Gabriel's greeting to Mary in 1:28 employs an expression that is closely related to *charis*. The angel addresses her as *kecharitōmenē*, favoured or grace-filled one (1:28). There is an echo here of the way in which *hesed* is used of Esther who pleased and won the king's favour or merciful love (Esther 2:9). The same echo of Esther is to be found in Luke 1:30 where Mary is said to have found favour (*charin*) with God. On this basis, we can make the claim that Mary, the favoured or grace-filled of God, is a woman of mercy. Exploring the echo of the story of Esther more broadly, we might note that both Mary and Esther are agents of salvation for God's people. Furthermore, *charis* is a

⁶ A different adjective (*oiktirmōn*) meaning merciful is found in Luke 6:36, "Be merciful as your heavenly Father is merciful" and in James 2:11 where it is predicated of Jesus and paralleled with "much compassion" (*polusplagchnos*). See LXX Psalm 51:3 where the Greek *oiktirmon* translates *rḥm* in Psalm 51:1.

⁷ For an ecological reading of Matt 5:7, see Elaine M. Wainwright, *The Gospel According to Matthew: the Basileia of the Heavens is Near at Hand* (Sheffield: Phoenix Press, 2014), 70-72.

characteristic of the Lukan Jesus. In 2:40, the favour or mercy of God is said to be “upon him”, and in 2:52, he is said to increase “in divine and human favour” under the tutelage of Mary and Joseph.⁸

In her song of praise (1:46-55), Mary announces that God’s mercy (*eleos*) is for those who fear God “from generation to generation” (1:50). She draws a link between God’s mercy, God’s help for Israel and God’s faithfulness to God’s promises (1:54). Those who hold God in awe and place their trust in God live in the sure knowledge that God’s mercy, understood as steadfast love, as womb compassion, as liberation, will never fail them. In this text, “God’s mercy (*eleos*, 1:50) is associated with God’s action on behalf of the vulnerable: God lifts up the lowly and fills the hungry with good things. At the same time, the powerful and rich will lose their privileged status (1:52-53).”⁹ In other words, God’s mercy and God’s concern for justice and right relationship are all of a piece for the Lukan Mary, as they are in the biblical tradition that informs the Lukan narrative. Mercy functions to restore the balance within and between the members of our Earth community.

Luke 1:58 speaks of the birth of John as an expression of God’s expansive mercy (*eleos*), or more precisely of God expanding or magnifying God’s mercy in Elizabeth. God’s expansive mercy becomes an occasion of rejoicing for neighbours and extended family. In Zechariah’s song of praise (1:68-79), the mercy (*eleos*) shown to Israel’s ancestors is an expression of God’s covenant remembering (1:72). The final verses of the canticle bring together two “mercy” concepts, *splagchna* (pl. bowels or entrails) and *eleous* (of mercy): “By the tender mercy (*splagchna eleous*) of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace (1:78-9).” The plural form *splagchna* echoes the plural form of the Hebrew noun for womb-compassion (*rahāmîm*) and captures something of the multi-layered character of God’s compassion and mercy, while “the combination of *splagchna* (inward parts or entrails) and *eleous* (of mercy) has an intensifying effect, pointing to the depth of God’s response.”¹⁰

Liberation or release for the most marginalised is at the heart of the mission of the Lukan Jesus. At the very beginning of his ministry, Jesus had gone into his hometown synagogue of Nazareth and appropriated to himself the words of the prophet Isaiah: the Spirit of God is upon him; God has anointed him to bring good news to the destitute and release to the shattered (Luke 4:16-20). When he encounters a funeral cortege at the gates of Nain, he is moved with compassion (*esplachnisthe*) for the plight of one who is shattered and under threat of a life of destitution. Women who lacked

⁸ For a more detailed treatment of Mary as a woman of mercy, see Veronica Lawson, “Maryām of Nazareth: Spirit-Filled Woman of Mercy and Justice” Catholic College Bendigo 2013 Marian Lecture.

⁹ Dowling, Elizabeth and Veronica Lawson, “An Earth Community Being Shattered by Displacement: Mercy Perspectives.” *Seachanges* 6. WSRT 20th Anniversary Volume, 2013 http://wsrt.asn.au/index.php?p=1_15.

¹⁰ Dowling and Lawson, “Earth Community,” 13.

the protection of a husband or adult son were among the most destitute in first century Palestine. The unnamed woman of our story has already suffered the loss of her husband. She now grieves for the loss of her adult son who is explicitly identified as a man. For a widow to lose her only son was nothing short of shattering. She would be entirely dependent on the goodwill of neighbours and friends and whatever extended family she may have had. Nain was a tiny village in the Valley of Jezreel in the southern part of Galilee. As in every town, the gate would have been the place where legal cases were determined and justice was delivered. Now, at the gate of this town, Jesus of Nazareth brings both mercy and justice. He feels the pain of the widow in his own being and responds by restoring life, not only to the young man, but to his mother, to the extended family and to the grieving village community. Like this young man, Jesus was the only son of a woman who had possibly been widowed by the time he began his public ministry. His mother is to know the same pain of loss as her unnamed “sister” in Nain. The sight of the funeral procession and the tears of the woman elicit the heart-felt compassion of Jesus. As we have seen again and again, the verb “to have compassion” denotes a deeply felt response in the depths of a person’s being. It implies not just an emotional response but action for mercy and justice. Tears will function later in this chapter as an instrument of hospitality (7:36-50). In this story, tears and touch bring life to a son who was lost and restore life to a community and family within that community.

Luke 10:25-37 is about being neighbour. It foregrounds the human characters and their relationships with each other. The lawyer who questions Jesus is trying to catch him out. Like Jesus’ audience, this legal expert knows the Jewish law regarding love of God and of one’s neighbour. He answers Jesus’ first question correctly. This leads to another “test” question: “Who is my neighbour?” Jesus replies with a subversive story that ends in yet another question: “Which of these three was neighbour?” The lawyer cannot avoid the obvious answer, though it would cost a Jewish legal expert dearly to admit that a Samaritan could be neighbour to a Jew in need. Rather than utter the word “Samaritan” he answers obliquely, “the one who showed mercy (*eleos*).” The Samaritan is “moved with compassion” (*esplagchnisthe*), literally “moved in the depths of his being” as was Jesus in the face of the suffering of the widow of Nain. The Samaritan befriends the wounded traveller and draws on all his resources to care for him: wine and oil to dress the wounds, his “own animal” as transport, finance for accommodation, companionship at the inn, provision for ongoing care. The story offers the shocking suggestion that a Samaritan knows more about love of God and of neighbour than do those who officiate in Temple worship, namely the priest and the Levite who “pass by”. The present ecological crisis calls us to new ways of being neighbour. We used to speak in terms of thinking globally and acting locally. If we are to be neighbour in our times, we need to think cosmically as well as globally, and to act globally as well as locally. Thinking cosmically means embracing the entire

14.2 billion year story of our expanding and evolving universe. It means accepting our cosmic identity and our intimate connectedness to the whole of creation. Thinking cosmically elicits wonder and respect for all created being and especially for God who is Source and Sustainer of all Creation. Cosmic thinking provides a context for acting globally and locally, for being neighbour in our local and global environments. Cosmic thinking invites us to focus not just on the human characters from different cultures and social strata in this story, but also on the neighbourly animal, the fruit of the vine and of the olive grove, and the silver coins formed of material extracted from the earth and engaged as signs of compassionate neighbourly love. It invites us “to live in the mercy of God” (Denise Levertov) by reverencing all of creation and the Creator of all that is.

We have explored the Lukan “mercy” passages relating to Mary and Zechariah, to the widow of Nain and to the one who showed mercy to a wounded traveler. As indicated above, there are many other “mercy” passages in Luke and other “mercy” passages in Mark and Matthew, as also in the rest of our sacred texts. As we conclude this exploration of mercy, we might make our own the prayer of Pope Francis: “Let us accept the grace of Christ’s Resurrection! Let us be renewed by God’s mercy, let us be loved by Jesus, let us enable the power of his love to transform our lives too; and let us become agents of this mercy, channels through which God can water the earth, protect all creation and make justice and peace flourish.”¹¹ We pray in humility, knowing that the liberating and enduring mercy of our womb-compassionate God is made present through the agency of all Earth’s elements. We might allow the texts we have explored to find their place in our hearts and provide us with an entry into other “mercy” texts as we search out ever new ways of bringing to the wounded “the complete comforting embrace” that heralds the “advent of mercy” for all that constitutes our world.

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¹¹ Pope Francis, *Urbi et Orbi Message, Easter 2013*. <http://www.news.va/en/news/pope-urbi-et-orbi-message-easter-2013-full-text>. Accessed 01/04/15.