

The Way of Mercy Hebrews 4:14-16

Introduction

Once there was a young soldier in Napoleon's army who committed an offense worthy of death. The day before he was scheduled to stand before the firing squad, the young man's mother went to Emperor Napoleon and begged him to show mercy to her son.

Napoleon harshly replied, "Woman, your son does not deserve mercy."

"I know," the mother answered. "If he deserved it, then it would not be mercy."

There is a very important truth in that mother's answer that I don't want you to miss.

"If he (we) deserved it, then it would not be mercy."

Our Lenten journey with Jesus brings us to the foot of the cross today. THIS IS THE WAY OF MERCY.

- This is the intersection where every human must come, whether they have followed Jesus here or chosen to walk their own paths. No one can avoid this part of their journey.
- The world would have you believe that all roads lead to heaven. That's a lie told by the devil so frequently that many people think it is true.
- But the truth is: Some roads lead to death and hell. The Scriptures are clear.

Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it. (Matthew 7:13-14)

- In another passage Jesus describes a time of great judgment like this:

Then he will say to those on his left, "Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me." (Matthew 25:41-43)

- No, all roads DO NOT lead to heaven. They do, however, all lead here. To the cross.

ALL ROADS LEAD TO THE CROSS

The cross has been called the "greatest dividing point" in all of human history. Because how people respond to the cross as they pass this way will determine their eternal destiny. All roads must eventually pass by here, and all travelers must eventually come face-to-face with the One who came to die for them ... the One who offers them mercy.

- It is a mercy extended to all, but not granted to all.
 - Some passersby will continue to follow the ways of this world, rejecting that mercy.
 - Others standing here will receive what Christ offers.

That's the story of the two thieves on the cross, isn't it? One arrogantly defiant; the other in humility begging for the mercy of God.

When George Bush was Ronald Reagan's Vice-President, he represented the United States at the funeral of former Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev. Mr. Bush would often recount how he was deeply moved by a silent protest carried out by Brezhnev's widow, Viktoria.

- Throughout Brezhnev's leadership of the Soviet Union, she had remained a mystery. Seldom seen and never quoted. Historians describe her as old-fashioned and gentle.
- In keeping with that long-established public demeanor, Viktoria stood motionless by the coffin as all of the people passed by to pay their final respects. She declined numerous invitations to sit or leave.
- Then, just as the soldiers were about to close the casket's lid for the final time, she performed an act of great courage and hope, a gesture that must surely rank as one of the most profound acts of civil disobedience ever committed.
- She stepped up to the casket and made the sign of the cross on her husband's chest.
- There in the citadel of secular, atheistic power, the wife of the man who had run it all for 18 years expressed her hope that her husband might receive mercy. Her best hopes were pinned on the cross of Jesus, and she prayed that somehow this same Jesus might yet have mercy on her husband.

Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy. (Micah 7:18)

You, Lord, are forgiving and good, abounding in love to all who call to you. Hear my prayer, Lord; listen to my cry for mercy. (Psalm 86:4-5)

But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. (Titus 3:4-5)

Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. (Hebrews 4:16)

Amen.