

Pentecost 2 6/11/23
Matthew 9:9-13 5A

“GO AND LEARN WHAT THIS MEANS, ‘I DESIRE MERCY, AND NOT SACRIFICE.’”

“Mirror, mirror on the wall, who is the fairest of them all?” You will recall from “Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs” that the wicked stepmother did not get the answer that she wanted.

The mirror is the most unforgiving, most heartless of things. The mirror shows us the truth of how we look.

The mirror of God’s Law told Matthew knew that he was a sinner and he knew it. And, so did everyone else.

Matthew was a tax collector, and you know about tax collectors. In the eyes of his fellow Jews, they were considered “traitors” because they worked for the Romans. But even more than that, tax collectors were outright thieves. They cheated people by charging more taxes than the person was required to pay and keeping the profit for themselves. And, his very occupation -- tax collector -- made him unclean by the Jewish law. Because he handled pagan currency, he was not allowed to participate in the sacrificial worship of the Jews, even if he wanted to.

The Pharisees were quite the opposite of Matthew. They were sinners, but they didn’t see themselves that way. In their eyes, they were righteous, without sin. They impressed their neighbors by their religious piety. But, God saw into their hearts. Jesus called them “white washed tombs,” because they looked good on the outside, but their hearts were dead in sin.

Jesus, by God’s eternal plan, journeyed to Capernaum, not to call the Pharisees, but this sinful, hated Matthew. And, the self-righteous Pharisees were outraged at Jesus. Worse than even calling Matthew

instead of them, He went to Matthew's home and ate with "sinners." They considered these "sinners" unworthy of the mercy of God. *"Go and learn,"* Jesus taught them, using the words of the Prophet Hosea, *"what this means: 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.' For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."*

God commanded His people to sacrifice animals for every morning and every evening, day after day. God commanded His children to sacrifice these animals because He was teaching them the Gospel -- that He would rather take the lifeblood of the innocent lamb than the lifeblood of the sinner. All these sacrifices pointed ahead to the Cross, where the Lamb of God would be sacrificed, as the one, true, all-sufficient sacrifice for the sins of all the world.

The Pharisees, however, had no need for this Lamb of God to take away their sin. They believed and trusted in their own works, which they believed earned them God's grace and favor.

"Mirror, mirror on the wall, who is the fairest of them all?" And you answer, "Me! I am!" This Sunday, we are called to follow in the footsteps of Matthew to follow Jesus, but all too often we don't. In fact, what we do is follow in the footsteps of the Pharisees, trusting in our works – especially comparing ourselves to our neighbor.

You know how it is, right? "I didn't have a child out of wedlock." "There his wife and kids are at home, while he's out chasing anything in a skirt." "My kid ... the police never called me to come pick up my kid." "He / she hasn't had a sober breath in 20-years!" "I've worked hard for what I have, I didn't get everything handed to me like ... you know who." I'm glad I'm not like those sinners!

"Follow Me," Jesus said to Matthew, and He did, not trusting in

himself -- his works, his sacrifices. Matthew knew that he was not the fairest before God, but a sinner, who could stand before God only by the Father's mercy.

Today, we fix our sight on the Evangelist St. Matthew. Like Matthew, we cannot hide from the truth of the mirror of God's Law. We know that we are by nature sinful and unclean; that we deserve only God's temporal and eternal punishment. We cannot heal ourselves by works or sacrifices. We need the healing touch of the Great Physician to be made well.

"Mirror, mirror on the wall, who is the fairest of them all?" Jesus is. And yet, God made the fairest of all the chief of sinners. As the Lamb of God, carrying the sin of the world, Isaiah describes Jesus this way,

He had no form or majesty that we should look at Him, no beauty that we should desire Him. He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces He was despised, and we esteemed Him not (53:2-3).

Because Jesus did that, we are forgiven -- forgiven for all the times we thought we deserved God's grace and favor; all the times we did not have mercy on our neighbor; all our sin.

That's why when Jesus calls to us, "*Follow me,*" we do. Just as the sick go to the doctor, those who know and feel their sin follow Jesus.

Jesus recreates us in the new birth of our Baptism. Through the water and the Word, Jesus frees us from the love of sin so that we may a reflection of Christ, reflecting the mercy God has had on us in Christ.

Jesus comes to us through His Word. In hearing His Word, preached in worship, read during family devotions, Jesus comes to breath new life into us so that live as the living reflections of God's mercy that we are in Christ.

Jesus comes to us with His healing touch through His very own Body and Blood, the medicine we need for our souls.

Through these means of grace, Jesus calls to us, heals us of our sins, and makes us new in Him so that we can be merciful as He is merciful to us.

We dare not follow in the footsteps of the Pharisees. We dare not come to church on Sunday morning and then return home to our family and work to continue in envy and jealousy of our neighbors, refusing to forgive, speaking evil of those around us.

This is why daily, we return to the waters of our baptism to repent, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me." Daily we pray that God will create a clean heart in us, a heart that has no love of sin, but a heart of mercy so that we may reach out in mercy as Christ has touched us with His mercy.

Let us learn from Jesus. To be clear -- He did not condone sin nor ignore sin. And, neither does His Church. We do not look the other way, wink at sin, or just allow everyone to do whatever seems right in his or her own eyes. Jesus called sinners to repentance, to turn from their love of sin, to love Him, to follow Him for forgiveness and life. This is what His Church continues to do until the day He comes to judge the living and the dead. We call sinners to Christ, to pardon, heal, make new, and give a new beginning in Christ.

Without condoning sin and tolerating false doctrine, we fling open wide the doors of our church to sinners, offering the mercy and forgiveness of Christ. If this Concordia Church is to be the House of God, then it must be above all else the House of Mercy.

Not only must Concordia, this Body of Christ in Beulah, be merciful,

but our own lives must be lives of mercy. New in Christ, we give thank offerings of not only our lips on Sunday mornings, but our hands and feet, our bodies and selves each day of the week, each hour of every day, that we may share the mercy of God in Christ Jesus.