

Luke 6:32-42 “The Measure of Mercy”

1. After nearly a decade of life out of college, we now live on a college campus again...and I have noticed that while some things have changed, a lot hasn't. For example, Taylor Johnson and Brent Myers are still performing stunts together in public, but of course, the one thing that is unchanging to every student's life on every college campus – the reality of going into debt – do you remember that moment you read those loan papers and then signed your life away, knowing that you will have to pay back every penny that you borrow? We all know what it feels like to be in debt to someone else...
2. And everyone hearing Jesus' teaching would have known what it feels like to be in debt. Relationships in the ancient world were ruled by a code of reciprocity. If you received goods from a patron, you were indebted to honor and be loyal to him. And his mercy was dependent upon your ability to reciprocate. So relationships were marked by careful calculation of debts and credits like weight on a scale and you would want to enter into relationships that could ultimately help yourself. So the popular maxim of life was, “Do unto others what you want them to do **for** you.”
3. Another code of the ancient world was the law of retribution. If someone hurts you, you hurt them. If someone takes your property, you have the right to take theirs. “Love your friends and hate your enemies”
4. In his teaching, our Lord challenges directly these cultural values by saying things like, “Do to others as you **would have** them do to you. Don't love only those who can love you back. But love your enemies. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.”
5. Jesus' words cut to the heart for us as well. Our culture values getting ahead, making a profit over anything else, and meeting our needs often at the expense of others. Revenge is seen as strength. We see it in conflicts between nations, in politics, in the religious community, and of course in our own lives. We are addicted to keeping score...calculating debts...and comparing ourselves to others. And we are masters at holding grudges and at times, even practice vengeance – if not with physical violence then by the words we use to destroy each other. I think we usually react in these ways because someone has offended us or wounded us and it hurts.
6. And this is precisely why Jesus' teaching to love our enemies is hard to swallow. It's one thing to love those who love us back but our enemies? After all that person has done and said and all the pain they've caused? Do you know what they deserve? Do you know what they owe me? ***How in the world can Jesus expect us to show kindness, love, and generosity to those who don't deserve it?***
7. About Ten years after the end of World War II, Hildegard and Jean Goss-Mayr, two Catholic peace workers, met with a group of Polish Christians in Warsaw. At one point they asked the group, “Would you be willing to meet with Christians from West Germany? They want to ask forgiveness for what Germany did to Poland during the war and to begin to build a new relationship.

First there was silence and then a man spoke up with passion and anger, “Jean and Hildegard, we love you, you are our friends, but what you are asking is impossible. Each stone of Warsaw is soaked in Polish blood! We cannot forgive!” Before the group parted, the Goss-Mayrs suggested that they say the Lord's Prayer together and without hesitation, they all joined in. “Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.” And all of the sudden, the group stopped praying and the room fell silent. And out of the silence, the same man who had spoken earlier

softly said, "I must say yes to you. I could no more pray the Our Father, I could no longer call myself a Christian, if I refuse to forgive. Humanly speaking, it is impossible, but God will give us his strength!"

8. **Why is it possible to show kindness and even forgiveness to those who don't deserve it?** Because *God* has been kind and forgiving to *us, even when we don't deserve it*. His kindness is expressed in Jesus who in self-giving love on the cross said to those who drove the nails, "Father, forgive them. For they don't know what they're doing." The cross boldly announces for those who receive it that the debt is paid. God is not like the patron who only looks to love those who can love him back. His mercy is not dependent upon our ability to reciprocate or earn it. Instead, his mercy is rooted in the faithfulness of his character and he offers compassion to all, equally, even to the ungrateful and the wicked. And all of us here at some point have been ungrateful and wicked. And if we don't think we have been, then we are like the person who criticizes someone with a speck of sawdust in their eye while we have a log sticking out of our own. Jesus reminds us that the measure we use to judge others will be used to judge us.
9. It is this recognition of how much we **need** mercy that is the catalyst for us to be able to **show** mercy. Walter Wink writes, "As we begin to love the enemy within, we develop the compassion to love the enemy without." His mercy gives us the freedom to love and forgive *even* our enemies – not to excuse their behavior, or forget what they've done to us, but to be released from our need to enact revenge and be the judge.
10. So today, Jesus comes and offers to us a life released from debt, from comparing ourselves to others and tearing them down in the process. He offers us freedom from greed and bitterness and pride.
11. So, in light of God's mercy that has been poured out to us, as we come to the table of the Lord to *receive* his grace, let us consider in our relationships how we may, by the power of the Spirit, *give* more grace. Amen.