

TEXT: Luke 6:27-38
THEME: God is kind to the ungrateful and wicked
SUBJECT: Acting like God
TITLE: Mercy

Seventh Sunday after Epiphany
24 February 2019
Messiah Moravian
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Jack Kornfield, a former State Department employee, quit his post in India to run a rehabilitation program for juvenile offenders in the District of Columbia. Most of the youth he worked with were gang members who had committed homicide.

One fourteen year old boy in his program, to prove himself to his gang, shot and killed an innocent teenager. At the trial, the victim's mother sat impassively silent until the end, when the youth was convicted of the murder. After the verdict was announced, she stood up slowly, stared directly at the boy and stated, "I'm going to kill you." The boy was taken away to a juvenile facility where he was incarcerated.

Out of envy Joseph's brothers incarcerated him in a deep pit so he would die a slow and painful death. A passing caravan created an opportunity for them to be rid of Joseph and make some money. They sold him into slavery.

As evidence for the proposition, we get as good as we give, a famine forces Joseph's brothers to trek to Egypt to find food. What they find is their brother Joseph in charge of all food distribution. The power of life and death now rests in Joseph's hands. What to do? Seek revenge? If not revenge, what does justice demand? What does reason justify?

Joseph, the victim of his brother's envy refuses to become the victimizer. Joseph declares that what his brothers intended for evil, God intended for the preservation of life. God, Joseph says, sent him before his brothers to insure they will have descendants on the earth.

We know what we live. We come to know God by acting like God, a God who refuses to play the victim when his son is murdered, who has the power to destroy the perpetrators of evil but chooses to preserve life.

Six months after the wannabe gang member was incarcerated, the mother of the slain boy visited his killer. Before the murder the boy had been living on the streets; this mother was the only visitor he had. They talked for a little while and when the mother left she gave the boy money for cigarettes.

The mother slowly increased the frequency of her visits, bringing food and small gifts. Near the end of his three-year sentence, she asked the boy what he planned to do when he was released. He was confused and uncertain, so she offered to help him with a job at a friend's company.

Then she inquired about where he would live, and since he had no family to return to, she offered him temporary use of the spare room in her house. For eight months he lived with her, ate her food, and worked at the job she got him.

One evening she called him into the living room to talk. “Do you remember,” she started, “when I said I was going to kill you?” “I sure do,” he replied. “I’ll never forget that moment.”

“Well, I did,” she went on. “I did not want the boy who killed my son for no reason to remain alive on this earth. I wanted him to die. That’s why I got you the job and let you live here in my house. That’s how I set about changing you. And that old boy is gone.

So now I want to ask you, since my son is gone, and that killer is gone, if you’ll stay here. I’ve got room, and I’d like to adopt you if you will let me.” She became the mother of her son’s killer, the mother he never had.

God is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. We come to know God by acting like God.

Adolph Weinman, a prizewinning sculptor who worked with the designer of Lincoln’s statue in the Lincoln Memorial, sculpted Elsie’s profile and submitted it to the US Mint in Washington. This very private face, its hair alight with the wings of Mercury, would be chosen to adorn million of American dimes and half dollars from 1916 to 1945.

Elsie was from Reading, PA., the home town of Wallace Stevens. Wallace graduated from Harvard in three years, then graduated from New York Law School, passed the New York bar, and worked for an insurance company. Elsie’s formal education ended with the ninth grade. Wallace became smitten, as they say, with Elsie and courted her for five years.

Upon one visit to Reading, Garrett, Wallace’s father asked pointedly if the only reason he came home so often was so that his mother could do his laundry, since otherwise he seemed to spend all his time with that girl across the tracks. Wallace stormed out of the house.

Then, thinking it over, he brought his shy, blond, blue-eyed girl home to meet his family. She dressed spectacularly for the occasion in clothes she herself had sewn, and wore a new broad-brimmed hat with flowers adorning it. But Garrett had hoped his son’s dalliance with Elsie would have ceased. He could no longer hide his real feelings and made the girl feel unwelcome in his home.

Wallace again stormed out of the house, telling his father that he did not intend to set foot there again as long as the old man was alive. It was a promise Wallace kept, one which would cause him unspeakable pain until his dying day.

Forgive, and you will be forgiven. We don’t get to choose not to be wounded by family or friends. We only get to choose to be vengeful or merciful. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful, for we come to know God by acting like God.