



Rector's Essay

Mercy, Mercy Me

By Jarrett Kerbel (09/18/26)

Sunday scripture in September is abundant with good news about God's Mercy. Like Jonah, we might find God's generosity offends our desire to see an enemy punished.

On this coming Sunday, we will encounter Jonah as he pouts and stewes in the shade of a plant God provides just for him. Why is Jonah out of sorts? Because God has had mercy on Nineveh, choosing not to destroy the city after the population heard God's judgment and repented.

Clearly, Jonah wants Nineveh to suffer. Nineveh is the enemy of Israel. How dare God have mercy on them and how dare God expect Jonah to welcome his enemy with generosity as God does.

Indeed, the book of Jonah is using satire to land a critique of Israel. The evil people of Nineveh know how to repent and return to God when Israel has forgotten both what they owe to God and how to repent. Israel is taking their specialness for granted and forgetting that their special relationship with the God who delivers and saves is a Gift of God's mercy.

Whenever I preach about Mercy - and I am preaching about it a lot this Fall - I am very aware that church people may forget that we are all dependent on God's mercy, and that as recipients of overwhelming mercy we owe the same to each other and to the world around us.

Our recent solemn remembrance of September 11, 2001 was tainted by an ugly bigotry toward our Muslim neighbors and fellow citizens. Some, often those claiming to be 'real' Christians, want to blame all Muslims and Islam itself for the horrific

events. This is prejudice. Extending culpability to a whole group based on religion or ethnicity is the very definition of prejudice.

From the perspective of God's mercy, what will we do instead? For me, I am reaching out to my muslim neighbors to build trusting relationships with them of deep understanding. Recently, I met a young Muslim man from Lewiston named Abbas and we had a lovely conversation. He jokingly (I think) tried to convert me to Islam. I declined and said that I am a happy follower of Jesus. It was a good first step toward loving my neighbor.