



Mercy forever.

## Lenten Sermon Six

### The Spirit Anointed Christ for Mercy – Lenten Worship Series

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*The Spirit Anointed Christ . . . to Free the Bruised*

*Based on Luke 4:18–19*

In our Lenten journey, we have talked about Jesus being anointed for mercy and how He shows mercy to the poor, the brokenhearted, the captives, and the blind. We have talked about how these things can be spiritual as well as physical and how we dare not forget the physical wellbeing of people. Tonight we think about the bruised. I have not always been sure what that means. Matthew's Gospel, Chapter 12, describes what Jesus was doing quoting from Isaiah 42:

<sup>18</sup>Here is my servant whom I have chosen,  
the one I love, in whom I delight;  
I will put my Spirit on him,  
and he will proclaim justice to the nations.

<sup>19</sup>He will not quarrel or cry out;  
no one will hear his voice in the streets.

<sup>20</sup>A bruised reed he will not break,  
and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out,  
till he leads justice to victory.

<sup>21</sup>In his name the nations will put their hope.”

I have come to think of the bruised as all the people we have talked about: the poor, the brokenhearted, the captives, the blind, and anyone and everyone else who appears to be useless, or who we might consider to be useless. What is more useless than a bruised reed or a smoldering wick? I think the bruised are anyone we consider beneath our ability to reach or beyond our ability to even comprehend.

The bruised, to me, are the clients in the developmental center for people with mental handicaps, whose families and churches have given up caring for them because it was beyond the family's abilities, patience, expertise, or treasure.

The bruised, to me, are those who suffer from mental illness and have worn out the patience of families, friends, and maybe even churches.

The bruised, to me, are those — and I have met so many — who seem to have the dark cloud around them wherever they go. Like Pigpen in the old Charlie Brown comics, whatever they try fails, and no matter how hard they work, they never get ahead.

The bruised, to me, are those in far off countries who live in abominable circumstances beyond their control, and no matter how hard they try to relieve their situation, it never changes. Like the people in the Bruce Springsteen song, they take “one step forward and two steps back.”

The bruised, to me, are those who suffer from our discrimination, neglect, and misunderstanding — from the homeless man in the streets to the alcoholic or the drug addicted in our major cities.

The bruised, to me, are those who have been bruised by life and circumstance — who we continue to bruise by benign neglect.

Not so the Christ. The bruised reed will not be broken and the smoldering wick will not be snuffed out. This is the Anointed One speaking. This is the suffering Servant predicted in the Old Testament speaking. This is the very Son of God speaking. The suffering Servant of God who hung upon a cross and died for us is speaking and calling us to be servants, too.

As one scholar wrote, “Jesus interacted with people in a respectful and attentive manner.” People were not a means to an end, but of themselves had intrinsic value. “He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous” (Matt. 5:45). The theological basis for this saying rests upon twin teachings from the Torah. God is revealed as a God who is righteous, full of compassion, and requires justice. He also is the Creator who made all humans in his image. For Jesus, this understanding was shown in how He loved people, particularly the poor, the outcast, and the unimportant. The time and tenderness with which Jesus cared for the poor, the sick, and the marginalized is striking, showing His heart of mercy.

Jesus treated those He encountered as people created in the image of God, even though sin had cracked and broken that image. Human beings were created to live in fellowship with God and to be His special creation. Because of this, Jesus advocated righteousness, justice, compassion, and mercy for all, expanding from our personal relationships to the social contracts that govern how nations treat their people and other nations.

Jesus expressed this clearly in His confrontations with the religious and political powers of His day. Matthew 23 is a compilation of seven statements spoken to the religious leaders, which begin, “Woe to you.” This is the fourth woe, “Woe to you teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices — mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law — justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former” (Matt. 23:23–24). The religious leaders were legalistically correct in the small matters, but missed the critical relational categories of justice, mercy, and faithfulness.”<sup>1</sup>

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The anointed Christ, anointed for mercy, wants us to be merciful, be servants, and call others into servant hood in the Kingdom. By His suffering, death, and resurrection, Christ gives us His righteousness, and so the question is: What does that righteousness look like in the world? Luther says:

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1 David Olson. *The American Church in Crisis*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 197–198.

It hates itself and loves its neighbor; it does not seek its own good, but that of another, and in this its whole way of living consists. For in that it hates itself and does not seek its own, it crucifies the flesh. Because it seeks that food for another, it works love. Thus in each sphere it does God's will, living soberly with self, justly with neighbor, devoutly toward God. This righteousness follows the example of Christ in this respect (1 Peter 2:21) and is transformed into his likeness (2 Cor. 3:18). **It is precisely this that Christ requires. Just as he himself did all things for us, not seeking his own good but ours only — and in this he was most obedient to god the Father — so he desires that we also should set the same example for our neighbors.**<sup>2</sup>

So as we make our journey to the cross with Jesus during Lent, I will ask you the question: How are we doing? Are we healing the bruised and the broken? Do you hate yourself and love your neighbors? Do you seek not your own good, but that of others? Do you have the same mind in you that was in Christ who emptied Himself and took on the form of a servant? Listen to these words from a Christian classic, John Bright's seminal book, *The Kingdom of God* as I ask the question again. Do you have the same mind in you that was in Christ who emptied Himself and took on the form of a servant?

And that, indeed, gives us to think. For as members of the Church of Christ our calling is that Servant calling. How seriously do we take it? Do we understand it at all? The world-wide mission of the Church we accept. We believe in one God; we declare that his Kingdom is over all the earth; we send missionaries to preach the gospel in far lands. Yet how little we have drawn the consequences of that great theology! Believing that one god is the God equally of all who call upon him, how often we seek to restrict the Kingdom along sectarian, or national, or racial lines — denying those beyond those lines comfortable fellowship with us in the Church of Christ! How often, by the small righteousness we offer, we withhold vast areas of life from the domain of God's Kingdom, and even declare that the Word of God has no business to speak there! Over the centuries the Servant is speaking to us, demanding that we get this straight over the gunsights: the Kingdom of God knows no man made limitations. The church which seeks, as did old Israel, to restrict the Kingdom to itself — whatever its official theology — simply does not hold a pure monotheism, but is worshiping a small, strange god made in its own image.

As for the cross of the Servant, it is not strange to us. We own to a crucified Savior. In that we stand with the mainstream of Christian faith from the beginning onward, and we do well to do so. We enthrone that crucified Savior in stained glass, wood, and stone — and in doctrine. To that cross we look for salvation. But we want that cross not at all. Indeed we would have it the chief business of religion to keep crosses far away. **We want a Christ who suffers that we may not have to, a Christ who lays himself down that our comfort may be undisturbed. The call to lose life that it may be found again, to take up the cross and follow, remains mysterious and offensive to us.** To be sure, we labor to bring men to Christ, and we pray, "Thy kingdom come." But our labor we see as a labor of conquest and growth, successful programs and dollars. Can it be that we are seeking to build the Kingdom of the Servant — without following the Servant? If we do so, we will doubtless build a great church — but will it have anything to do with the Kingdom of God?

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2 LW 31:299-300

Let us, then, be reminded that the task of the Church is not and cannot be other than the Servant task. We pray as we have been taught to pray, 'Thy kingdom come.' And the answer we get is the answer of the Servant: 'If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross.' We renew our prayer, 'thy kingdom come,' because we have no other prayer to pray. But we renew it with the deepest confession of sin: have mercy upon us, for we are unprofitable servants!"<sup>3</sup>

Remember what Luther said, **"It is precisely this that Christ requires. Just as he himself did all things for us, not seeking his own good but ours only — and in this he was most obedient to god the Father — so he desires that we also should set the same example for our neighbors."** Remember Jesus was bruised for our iniquity. His body was broken for us on the cross. Maybe we need to change the descriptor we use. Instead of saying Jesus came to save us, we should say Jesus came to make us healthy. What would it mean for us as servants of Christ to heal the bruised?

Perhaps the most useful way to describe the biblical understanding of health is to portray it as a cause for which one lives. When Christ healed the sick of His age, He linked them to a cause greater than themselves. He invited them into the kingdom of God, which immediately provided the supplicants with a personal identity, with a destiny to live out their lives, and with a community of faith. It is within the Kingdom that we live out the stories of our lives. The process of growing, of striving for the cause, is our "story." But this is the very phenomenon that makes life exciting and health-producing. *Wholeness* means to be vitally involved with the purposes of the Kingdom. It is this vitality that expresses the "health" of our personhood. People who are whole in Christ exhibit the positive hope that Christ, by means of His death and resurrection, achieved for us all.

To illustrate, a woman can live out her life's "story" as a mother of two children with a career as a teacher by healthily devoting her energies to her home and her vocation. But the motivation that compels this woman is the love of Christ who has brought wholeness to her life. She lives not for herself, but for the health of those whom her life touches.

Health as wholeness can be noticed in people as they express themselves. Their personalities show energy and vitality as if touched by a higher purpose. Their intellects demonstrate the capacity to seek out and apply useful knowledge for the benefit of others. Their characters reveal that a Greater One rules within: "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2:5).<sup>4</sup>

So who are the bruised in your life? Someone in your family, a friend, or a fellow church member? As a servant of the Anointed One who was anointed to be merciful, how can you show mercy? Remember when we deny mercy to the bruised, we deny Christ, we deny who and what we are! We deny the one who was bruised for us, was broken for us, who strengthens us with His body broken for us and His blood shed for us.

Amen.

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3 John Bright, *The Kingdom of God*, (Nashville, TN: Pierce & Washabaugh, 1953), 154,155.

4 Ludwig, op cit.