

The Rev. J. Lee Hill, Jr., Senior Pastor
Christian Fellowship Congregational Church (UCC)
1601 Kelton Road
San Diego, CA 92115
jhill@christianfellowshipucc.org

New Testament Reading: 2 Corinthians 2:4ff

Sermon Title: The Cry of Mercy

There is a cry that one is difficult—or challenging to say that least that is not easy forgettable.

It is the cry that comes after you've been folded up by an older brother.

It is the cry that comes after you've pinned down by older cousin.

It is the cry that comes after you've been cornered by someone of strength.

MERCY!

MERCY!

MERCY!

Is it an unforgettable cry!

It is an unimaginable cry!

It is a guttural cry for release, for respite, for rest.

The Cry of Mercy is a cry for freedom.

The Cry of Mercy is a cry for grace.

This morning we had two wonderful readings of our sacred scripture, both from the New Testament canon; the first a reading from the Gospel and the second, an Epistle or a Letter, from the one who first persecuted the church who then went on to become a progenitor of the New Testament house churches in Corinth, Paul.

Where we find Paul in today's epistle lesson this morning is in a very unique place and position. Paul, who has become a dynamic and impressive church innovator has experienced some deep-seated hurt and pain in his quest to preach and teach the Good News of Jesus Christ. The pain that Paul experiences is not just that his feathers have been ruffled by someone in the congregation, nor is it that that his ego or his reputation has dragged through the mud because of some scandalous and salacious sin—what Paul has experienced is some of the worst hurt that one could every experience in their life. What Paul has experience is Church Hurt.

Church hurt is unique kind of hurt. It is not a hurt that one is able to easily get up from walk away, but it is a hurt that stings and burns, it is a hurt that is dull and unending, it is a hurt that makes individuals want to give up on everyone and everything to do with “church” as a means of escape from its vicious and lethal graps.

Church hurt comes in all forms, and it is not a respecter of persons.

When young teenage women find themselves pregnant with child
When men in the church are overlooked from leadership
When women in the church get on the phone and gossip
When members in the church emotionally abused
When sexuality is not celebrated as unique gift of God
When money is missing and no one is blame but the new member
When leaders lead from places of power authority not holiness and integrity

Church hurt comes in all forms. Yet its sole function is provide Satan with a way to sever relationship, a way to break down communitie—its sole function is utter destruction of the very thing that God has sought to build and establish—the Church of Jesus Christ which is to be constantly a place of love, reconciliation, hope and heavenly healing for a world that consistently turns its back on God.

The bible is not clear exactly what kind of church hurt Paul experiences here in the text. The bible is not exactly clear who has caused this kind of church hurt, some scholars have worked hard to say that is the man who slept with his father’s wife in 1 Corinthians 5:1-8. But the biblical text remains decidedly silent, and Paul is careful not reveal the identity of the person who has caused this pain—because the power is not in identify who caused the pain—but focusing on our energy on what Paul does with his church hurt....

It does not say that someone lied on Paul in a business meeting
It does not say that someone punched Paul after the business meeting
It does not say that someone charged Paul with theft of church funds
It does not say that someone started a vicious rumor about Paul
It does not say that someone ...

What the text simply says that the church hurt was so strong, so real, so powerful, so destabilizing that Paul was unable to fulfill his desire to travel to the city of Corinth so that he could be encouraged by the witness of the people there and be renewed by the joy that he once knew of the people who faithfully responded to the Good News of God’s radical and inclusive love for not only Jew but Gentile as well.

Paul was hurt;
it was a Church Hurt that was initiated by one and magnified by many.

Paul knew the experience of being pinned down by heaviness of hurt

Paul knew the experience of being cornered with church hurt
Paul knew the experience of being folded up...

And it is from this experience that Paul not only cries out for MERCY, but in the silence that follows his own cry of mercy—he hears in his spirit the mercy-filled cry of the very one who has caused him the greatest hurt that he has felt in his life.

Mercy suits the case.

Mercy meets the need.

Mercy becomes not only Paul's balm to ease his pain, but community's balm as well.

Here Paul is reminded that

if one member of the community experiences joy, all know joy;

...experiences achievement, all know achievement;

...experiences suffering, all know suffering;

...experiences loss, all know loss

Here is the text Paul is reminded of the interconnectedness, the interrelatedness of community. During the Civil Right Movement, when black life matter even less than does on our city streets today Martin King stood tall to proclaim the truth of our interconnectedness in world that wanted us to be separate but equal, divided yet one nation of people. He said "in a real sense all of life is inter-related. All persons are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly. I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be, and you can never be what you ought to be until I am what I am what I ought to be. This is the inter-related structure of reality."

The hurt that Septima Clarke, Fannie Lou Hammer, Martin King, William Sloan Coffin and Rabbi Abraham Heschel and others who dared to stand boldly on the frontlines of the Civil Rights Movement experienced was real—yet their focus, like Paul, was not caught up on their experience of hurt and pain that they failed---in their own cries for Mercy to hear the Cries of Mercy---

People thought it was ridiculous when Martin King cried out forgive the men and women of the white majority who bruised and battered the lives of black men and women.

In a sermon preached in 1957 King told his community, "when one matures, when one rises above the early years of childhood, he begins to love people for their own sake. He turns himself to high loyalties. He gives himself to something outside of himself. He give himself to causes that he lives for and sometimes will even die for. He comes to the point that now he can rise above his individual concerns, and he understands then what Jesus mean when he says, "He who finds his life shall lose it; he who loses his for my sake shall find it."

This is the place where Paul arrives, quite suddenly...
Where the stinging pain of own church hurt does not guide his thoughts.
Where the headache-making thought of the individual do not guide his action.

Paul arrives at place, where
His cry of mercy
His cry of fault
His cry of blame

...is not as important as the cry of mercy from even the one who has inflicted the most painful blow to gut that he has every experienced.....

Perhaps Paul thought about his own journey—and the grace that surrounded his life.
Perhaps Paul thought about his persecuting life—and unique of Jesus he received.

Perhaps Paul thought about the people he killed with words...
Perhaps Paul thought about the people he killed with deeds...
Perhaps Paul thought about the churches that destroyed....
Perhaps Paul thought about his own life...
Perhaps Paul thought about that moment when...
--when suddenly a light from heaven shine upon his way, as he traveling the road to Damacus.

Perhaps Paul's thoughts turned to the man who hurt him.
Perhaps Paul's thoughts turned to the way that community, under his encouragement.....

shunned him...as he cried for mercy in the midnight hour
shamed him....as he for mercy in the noonday
dragged him down...as he silently lifted his voice to Lord
held him hostage

...and refused to let him forget what a terrible crime he had committed against Brother Paul.

I don't know who I'm preaching to today.
I don't know who here is cried through the night for Mercy!
I don't know what your cry consisted of:
Maybe there is loss on you job.
Maybe you've lost the love of your life.

Maybe your wife has just given up on your marriage.
Maybe your children have decided to serve some strange God.
Maybe your sister has refused to speak to you again.
Maybe your family has robbed you blind of dime in the bank....

God knows, your cry is real!
God knows, your pain is real!
God knows your struggle....and has heard your CRY of MERCY!

And yet God is calling you higher—to listen.

The Lord is
Calling you to step beyond your comfort zone.
Calling you to move beyond your place of victimization....
Calling you to move beyond your place of hurt....
Calling you to step beyond pain the past....

Listen for the voice of the Lord....

Calling you not to live in forgetfulness, but live radical love and forgiveness.

Your Cry of Mercy has been heard on high....and you have been forgiven.

Listen, and share that same forgiveness with another.

Amen.