

"The Cost of Mercy"

Text: 1 Peter 2:9-10

May our triune God - Father, Son, and Holy Ghost - bless you with his undeserved love, his mercy, and his peace. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians:

Kids tend to grow up believing that pretty much everything in life is free. Part of a parent's job is disabusing them of that notion – thus the tried and true "*Money doesn't grow on trees.*" Yet this particular misconception is not limited to children. Adults can also develop a naïve perception of "free." While there are exceptions, the general rule is that nothing is free. Nearly all "free stuff" either cost somebody else or comes with strings attached. Some of you may have experience with those "free vacation packages" where the cost was paid by those who finally gave in and bought a timeshare about three hours into the intense sales pitch. Some way, somehow, someone pays. Free government handouts are paid for by taxpayers. Free museums and parks are paid for by donors. You yourself pay for "free" television and radio by having to sit through obnoxious advertising. Free is almost never free.

Yet what about all those "best things in life" that they claim are free – things like love, kindness, and mercy? This morning we are going to explore one item in that list: mercy. Does mercy have a cost? If so, what is it?

The text that will serve as the basis for our study of "*The Cost of Mercy*" is found in the Second Chapter of Peter's First Epistle, verses 9 and 10:

^{ESV} **1 Peter 2:9-10** *But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. ¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.*

So far the very words of God. What a joy and privilege to have these very words of God for our continual guidance and comfort. Authored by God himself, they are most certainly worthy of our careful study and meditation. To this end we pray, "**Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth.**" Amen.

Have you seen the bumper sticker: "*The devil values your opinion*"? I think I know what the intended meaning or message is, and I like it.

Satan is actually big on opinions, isn't he? More to the point, he wants human beings to be big on opinions. In fact if he can just get mankind to accept the premise that strongly held opinions are true and right, most of his work is already done. Here's why.

Human beings never come to know the gospel naturally. Salvation through faith in Jesus Christ is always *revealed* truth; that is, it is never something that a human being can up with all on his own. With this understanding, the devil's strategy becomes fairly obvious. If he can get human beings to attach themselves to their own ideas about God, sin, and salvation, man will always and only be lost eternally *because man never gets it right on his own*. Christianity is that mystery that has been hidden down through the ages and revealed only by God the Holy Spirit. Someone had to tell us God's plan and, once told, we have been called to tell others.

We live in a world that has ruled out absolutes of right and wrong. Everything is reduced to an opinion – your opinion, my opinion, the other guy's opinion. And every opinion is equally valid, equally "right." Any and all standards of *dictated* right and wrong (right and wrong as determined by another and imposed on us) have been excluded. They are simply unacceptable.

We need to understand this basic truth about our society because the world sees you, conservative Christians, as among the most opinionated individuals on earth. More to the point, though they profess to honor all opinions, they despise you for yours. The irony here is that Christians don't really have religious opinions. An opinionated person is someone who demonstrates *undo* adherence to his own views or ideas. We fail in our calling as Christians, and certainly as Christian witnesses, each time we allow such an impression to stand. We do the dying world a great disservice if we fail to drive home to them, with unflagging persistence, that in the areas of faith and religion *we have no opinions*. We are prophets of God – God's messengers. We speak *his* words. Our opinions can therefore *never* be our own thoughts, our own ideas. We are bound, mind and heart, to the Word and Will of God. Nor does God have opinions. An opinion is something more than a hunch and less than a positive fact, and therefore God has no opinions. God's Word deals only with facts, since that Word is truth.

What we therefore believe and teach are *objective facts* proclaimed by God in his holy Word. So said Paul: "**Now I would remind you,**

brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, ² and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you--unless you believed in vain. ³ ¶ For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:1-4)

Failure to simply proclaim the Word and Will of God as *God's truth and not our own opinions* brings tragedy – for ourselves, for our family, for our unbelieving neighbor. Natural man has many strange ideas about faith and salvation. The vast majority of these bizarre notions carry with them damning consequences. We examine one such area in greater detail this morning: the mercy of God. From our text we learn that *God is indeed merciful, but not as the world uses and understands the term*. As the world typically understands and uses the word, God is anything but merciful.

You've all had experience with this "Yes, but not that way" sort of thing before. "Is your child 'special'?" Yes, but not the way you mean it. "Does your husband play around?" Yes, if you mean golf. No if you mean something else. We encounter the same sorts of problems in the area of religion. "Is your church reformed?" Not the way the world uses the term today – even though we are named for the man through whom the Lord accomplished the Reformation. "Are you evangelical?" Again, yes, but not the way society today understands that label today.

So what about mercy? "Mercy" to our society indicates more weakness than strength. In a general way that's exactly what the world today wants, especially in their religious leaders – they want spineless cupcakes. The world rages against any Christian who will stand on the absolutes of God's Word. That is also what the world today wants in a god. They crave a god without mandates or conviction. They want a god who indulges their every whim and demand.

It is, in fact, this perverted view of God himself that has tainted mankind's perception of *mercy*. I don't need to tell you that the world believes that if there is a God, then he must be a "merciful" God. What do they mean by "merciful"? He must, in their opinion, be a God who forgives any and all who try to be "good." That works out nicely for those who thought up the notion, since most of the world's population would categorize themselves as basically good people. Has anyone ever met an unbeliever who would describe himself as "bad"? Our society lives under the illusion that God will, in the end, simply apply that spineless kind of "mercy" toward them and just let bygones be bygones.

Follow through along this line of thought and sooner or later you will have to arrive at the conclusion that God really doesn't mean what he says. Again the picture is like an indulgent parent who threatens, but never carries out the punishment. God therefore really does not mean it when he says, "**He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be damned.**" (Mark 16:16) Jesus didn't really mean it when he said, "**I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father, except through me.**" (John 14:6) So too he must have been joking or just kidding around when he foretold what he would say to the unbelievers at the final judgment: "**Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.**" (Matthew 25:41) Amazingly, the world at large actually believes that if they simply choose to deny that God will render any such verdict, then God will render no such verdict.

This is the world's view of God and the mercy of God. The fact is, as the world understands the term, God is actually anything but merciful. God demands justice for sin. He demands justice for your sins, my sins, the sins of every man, woman, and child ever born. No sin is overlooked. To overlook sin would make God a liar, for he himself has pronounced a sentence of death as the penalty for sin: "**The soul that sins shall die.**" (Ezekiel 18:20). Someone has to die for every sin.

This also explains why Christianity is the only world religion that works in the real world. Christianity does not promote the idea of a God who just overlooks sin; it introduces the one true God that has placed on his own Son "**the iniquity of us all.**" God exacted punishment on the Innocent so that the guilty might go free. That means that for each of your sins God either punished his Son, or, rejecting that payment, he will punish you. The tragedy of hell is that no one has to go there. "**For (God) made (Jesus) who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.**" (2 Corinthians 5:21) God has already punished his Son for our sins. Not one single human being need suffer in hell. "**Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved.**"

In contrast to the world's idea of mercy, our text paints quite a different picture. Far from inherently deserving of the love and mercy of God, we were less than nothing in God's eyes. We were enemies. Our text puts it this way: "**(You) once were not a people...**" and, "**(you) had not obtained mercy...**" Our text says that we had to be "**called out of darkness.**" Understand these words well. Before the Holy Spirit brought saving faith into your heart, you could expect no mercy from your God. God is not merciful toward those who reject him and the Son he sent to save them. He will certainly never overlook sin.

Scripture Readings

The bottom line here is that the *mercy* of God can never nullify or cancel the *justice* of God. This is exactly that for which the world is hoping – and planning. They hope to find a god who does not mean what he says, does not follow through on his promises, and will not administer justice on Judgment Day. In fact it is on this notion, this man-made idea, that they gamble their eternal future. All who do so will be tragically, bitterly, and eternally disappointed.

God has shown his love and mercy to the world, but he has done so by sending his only Son to bear the punishment for sin in our place. That is the cost of mercy. Justice had to be served. Sin had to bring death. If sin *could* be overlooked, God would not have sent his own dear Son to suffer as he did. What an odd thought – and yet mankind is hoping against hope that God has done just that. They are gambling eternity on the idea that even if God did send his Son to suffer for man's sins, in the end he will simply overlook their sin - for no particular reason at all – just because he is "merciful."

In fact it is just here that we see the true mercy of God. God *could not overlook sin*. He would have been perfectly justified in *condemning* the whole world because of their sin, but he could not simply ignore it. In hell each one of us would have received exactly what each one of us deserves. God showed us his mercy by offering us an escape plan: faith in his Son Jesus Christ as an acceptable substitute for perfect obedience.

These are not opinions. These are *facts* that God himself has revealed to us – life and death facts with eternal significance. And now God has called each one of us to repeat these revealed facts to a dying world. That's exactly what our text tells communicates when it calls us "***a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people.***" Our life's work then is to "***proclaim the praises of Him who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light.***"

The cost of God's mercy was paid by his Son. This is the simple fact the world needs to hear. Amen.

ESV **Isaiah 55:6-11** "Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near; ⁷ let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. ⁸ For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. ⁹ For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. ¹⁰ "For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, ¹¹ so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

ESV **Matthew 20:1-15** "For the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. ² After agreeing with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard. ³ And going out about the third hour he saw others standing idle in the marketplace, ⁴ and to them he said, 'You go into the vineyard too, and whatever is right I will give you.' ⁵ So they went. Going out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour, he did the same. ⁶ And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing. And he said to them, 'Why do you stand here idle all day?' ⁷ They said to him, 'Because no one has hired us.' He said to them, 'You go into the vineyard too.' ⁸ And when evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, 'Call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last, up to the first.' ⁹ And when those hired about the eleventh hour came, each of them received a denarius. ¹⁰ Now when those hired first came, they thought they would receive more, but each of them also received a denarius. ¹¹ And on receiving it they grumbled at the master of the house, ¹² saying, 'These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.' ¹³ But he replied to one of them, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius? ¹⁴ Take what belongs to you and go. I choose to give to this last worker as I give to you. ¹⁵ Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?'

ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

2510 E. Divide Ave. Bismarck, ND 58501

Parsonage and Office: (701) 223-4885 Cell: (701) 425-5483

Website: www.bismarcklutheran.org

Mark Johnson, President Eileen McEnroe, Head Organist

Michael Roehl, Pastor Today's Organist: Eileen McEnroe

The 16th Sunday after Pentecost – September 24, 2017

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 2 (Red Hymnal)

"To Thy Temple I Repair"

The Order of Service – Hymnal page 15ff. (Red Hymnal)

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

The Old Testament Lesson: (Isaiah 55:6-11) God has established for each human being a window during which he may come to know his Savior Jesus and be converted and thus saved. That window is called our time of grace, and many today go on rejecting because they suppose that there is always time to "get right with God." Our first reading reminds us that that is not the case. No one knows when their time of grace will end, which is why our text reminds us that *now is the time*.

The New Testament Lesson (Matthew 20:1-15) Our second reading advances the thought of our Old Testament lesson. Not only do those who are brought to faith in the last hour of their lives also spend eternity in heaven, it is a testimony to man's misunderstanding of "grace" that some object to this fact. Those who are converted very late in life share heaven equally with lifelong Christians. In this reading Jesus himself explains that this is the nature of his undeserved love for sinners.

The Confession of Faith -

The Nicene Creed – (Hymnal page 22)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 26 (Stanzas 1-5) (Red Hymnal)

"Praise the Almighty"

The Sermon – Text: 1 Peter 2:9-10 (Printed on the back page)

"The Cost of Mercy"

The Offertory – (Hymnal page 22)

The Prayers

The Pre-Communion Hymn – 307 (Red Hymnal)

"Draw Nigh and Take the Body of the Lord"

The Preparation for Holy Communion (Red Hymnal page 24ff)

The Distribution

The Nunc Dimittis (Red Hymnal page 30)

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 26 (Stanza 6) (Red Hymnal)

"Praise the Almighty"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors worshipping with us this morning and invite you to join us each Sunday at this time. We are glad you are here! **To our Visitors seeking an altar at which to commune** – Since we desire to follow the words of our Savior, we practice "Close Communion" – a practice that is not new to confessional Lutherans. This practice stresses both our concern for others, not wanting them to receive the sacrament to their harm (1 Cor. 11:27-30) and the importance of unity in confession and faith (1 Cor. 10:16-17). For this reason we ask that anyone who has not established this unity through membership in a CLC congregation please first meet with the pastor to discuss this Scriptural doctrine before communing. This is a practice that we follow out of love and concern for you, and out of obedience to God's Word.

Attendance - Sunday (45) Ave (43) August Mortgage Balance (\$36,792)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday school and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service w/Communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship and coffee time
	-11:30 a.m.	– Church Council Meeting
Wednesday	-6:00 p.m.	– Confirmation Class
	-7:00 p.m.	– Midweek Bible Study
Next Sunday	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday school and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship and coffee time

CLC News – Pastor David Schaller is considering the call to Immanuel of Mankato. A report of last week's CLC board meetings will be available in the coming days.

In Our Prayers – Myron Schiermeister is recovering at home after a serious woodworking accident. Your prayers are certainly appropriate.

Offering Box – This morning we begin our new procedure for offerings. There will be no collection during the service. You are invited to drop your offerings in our new offering box before or after the service. The box is located on the back wall of the sanctuary near the piano.

Wednesday Confirmation and Bible Study – We return this week to our regular schedule with Confirmation at 6pm and Bible study at 7pm.

Christmas Flowers – If you are interested in ordering Christmas flowers, please fill out the sign-up sheet on the mailbox table.

Church Council – The Council is scheduled to meet this morning.