

Monday

Read Matthew 5:1-12

Today and tomorrow, we re-introduce the two suggested practices mentioned in the sermon. If you give either of these a try, and I pray you do, I'd love to hear about it. Give me a buzz or email pastorsethnorington@gmail.com For today, consider starting to look upon others with mercy.

So many things trigger our immediate judgment. The way someone looks, the way they behave in public, something they say, the way they say it. Next time you pass someone on the street or in the store that triggers your harsh judgment because they are fat, skinny, wearing certain clothes a certain way, are from a certain racial, ethnic, or religious group, make themselves out to be smart, stupid, rich, poor, safe, or suspicious, check yourself in those judgments. Jesus sees people and has mercy and compassion on them. That judgment muscle has been built up. Instead, don't exercise that muscle and start training yourself to look upon that person you want to judge with mercy. Whisper to yourself a simple prayer or blessing like, "Lord, bless this person," or, "Child of God, may you be well." This will help you interrupt your labeling and judging and help you start showing mercy so when the opportunity arises, you can act with the mercy and compassion of Jesus.

Go into the world and give it a try!

Tuesday

Read Matthew 9:9-13

Our second practice is making a seven day commitment to positive speech.

Make this promise to yourself or within your family: *I promise to practice positive speech for the next seven days. I will only speak*

words of compassion and affirmation about myself and others. I will avoid making critical or disparaging comments. That is a tough task, indeed. It's going to be hard for me. But can you imagine how much would change in your home, workplace, school, etc., if you committed to speaking mercifully for seven days? Try it and find out! I think you'll find you take more time before speaking and think harder about how what you feel you need to say can be framed positively.

Wednesday

Matthew 12:1–8 and Hosea 6:1-6

The center of morality for Jesus is mercy. The Gospel of Matthew especially points to Jesus' mercy continually. Jesus cites Hosea 6:6 twice in Matthew to call people to live and deal with one another mercifully.

There is a morality that hardens and a morality that softens. The Pharisees had an encyclopedic knowledge of God's laws and how to apply them, but their approach and application led them to be morally hard and inflexible. Their morality led them to be more severe with themselves and more severe with others. This is a route that is very tempting to all of us. The more we know of morality and God's ways the more likely we are to be ungracious and unmerciful to others and to ourselves as we demand an ever-increasing level of perfectionism.

Yet the first test of adhering to Jesus' morality is not whether you become more morally hardened, but whether you become more morally, mercifully softer to yourself and others. The merciful are those who come to the aid of the needy and those who are not only prepared to put up with their own troubles but also take on the troubles of others.

How can you mercifully soften your Christ-like morality to bless others?

Thursday

Romans 12:1-3

Hopefully, the translation of the Bible you read says something like this for verse 1: “Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, **in view of God’s mercy**, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God – this is your true and proper worship.”

Perhaps in some way F. Kefa Sempangi had this verse in mind when he responded with mercy to his would-be assassins. Perhaps Tomas Borge was somehow inspired by them, too.

God, in Jesus Christ, extends to you mercy upon mercy. In response, offer yourself as a living sacrifice to God through the mercy you extend to others.

Mercy!

Friday

Please prayerfully read and reflect upon Psalm 51 and Matthew 5:8.