

# Mercy, what has become of us?

Stanton Reformed Church

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Focus: Jesus said, those who work mercy receive mercy.

Function: Mercy is an act of faithfulness, ongoing forgiveness and alleviating suffering.

Do/Think: keep walking in mercy.

Stanton Reformed Church defines itself as a community of grace.

And then our website goes on to say...

Stanton Reformed Church accepts into our family God's children of all ages, races, colors, ethnicities, nationalities, sexual identities, gender expressions, and mental or physical abilities; without regard to income, family structures, immigration status, or education.

That's a beautifully broad welcome.

And then it goes on to explain why.

Why do we have such a broad welcome?

It says, We see God's light in every person.

There's more, more explanation... it says,  
That posture (that of seeing God's light in every person) guides our journey every day as we seek to learn from one another and to know God.

There's more... Inspired by the actions and attitudes of Jesus Christ, we commit to embrace, affirm, accept, and support all who enter our doors.

That sounds great... how does it work though? How can we measure whether or not we are upholding this broad welcome?

What does welcome and acceptance, what does grace look like when the rubber hits the road?

Well, it continues...

We honor this commitment to hospitality (we've introduced a synonym for welcome) - we honor this commitment to hospitality in our invitation to worship, reception of members, participation in the sacraments, ordination of leaders, hiring of staff, and solemnization of marriages.

That means - all are welcome. Seriously.

All are welcome to worship.

All are welcome to become members.

All are welcome around the table at communion.

All members are welcome to baptize their children.

To be ordained as elders or deacons.

To be employed as staff.

All are welcome to celebrate marriage.

In many ways this seems like a no brainer - well of course, we're a church.

But we all know too well that not all churches are a welcoming place.

And even here in our sanctuary, we see remnants of a time past where not everyone was welcome.

Our balcony was meant to segregate people of different skin color.

This pulpit, our conference room has not always welcomed women leaders.

But we at Stanton Reformed Church are seeking to live into extending grace to all of God's children... to be a community of grace.

We are living into being a community of grace...

Perhaps the most beautiful section of the introduction on our website is the last paragraph that says...

We are a people of faith and of doubts, of truths and of questions, of joy and sadness, of grace and of love; we invite you to share in the journey with us.

We are on a journey... of welcome, of understanding, of growing, of grace.

When scripture mentions grace, it means favor accompanied by sweetness or loving-kindness.

Showing favor to another with sweetness or loving-kindness as the method.

What is the difference between grace and mercy?

Mercy is by definition compassion, forgiveness, charity, and clemency.

If Grace is showing favor, mercy is forgiveness.

Grace is definitely not the same thing then. We can show a favor, do a favor, even welcome another with kindness and still not forgive.

Forgiveness is a whole other beast.

This beast of forgiveness is what Jesus was talking to his disciples about in today's passage from Luke.

Jesus uses the word stumbling to talk about sinning here. Stumbling is gonna happen along our journey, he says.

But he cautions them, don't be a cause for someone else to stumble.

And if someone else causes you to stumble - if someone else sins against you, hurts you, tell them to stop.

And if they repent - if they say I'm sorry or I'll do better. Forgive them.

And you can hear them arguing perhaps - but what if they keep doing it.

It makes me think this "saying" of Jesus wasn't theoretical. It sounds like they were on the road together.

And they were bothering one another... Peter is touching me.

Peter, stop touching him. John, forgive Peter.

Silence for a ¼ mile and then again, what did they hear. Peter is touching me again.

So Jesus says - listen, don't hurt one another. If you do, say sorry. Do better.

And forgive each other.

But what if he keeps touching me!??

Keep forgiving him!??

Isn't it fun to imagine Jesus and his disciples on a road trip in a tour bus. Some are sleeping, some are snoring.

Some have headphones in, listening to podcasts or their favorite tunes.

Jesus is trying to enjoy the view out the window when he has to deal with all that nonsense.

John, stop touching him for goodness sake.

Listen, everyone. Wake up. Headphones off. Listen to me.

Forgiveness. It's a thing. You gotta do it. You gotta keep doing it. Over and over. It's not easy. I know.

Seriously I know.

And I don't mean just being kind to people, doing them favors. I mean compassion.

And one of them mumbles to another - He's crazy. I don't have enough faith for that.

And Jesus hears him...

He hears them; Jesus hears us too -  
forgiveness is hard business. Forgiveness is  
often a long game.

Forgiveness is an over and over game -  
sometimes because the person keeps hurting  
us but other times because letting go is really  
hard, unhooking our hurt is really hard work.

But Jesus persists telling them that they have  
enough faith. It's not a matter of faith.

He looks out the window of the tour bus and  
he says - you see that mulberry tree.

You have enough faith to uproot that  
mulberry tree and plant it in the sea.

And then they laugh. Why?

Well, of all trees to pick. A mulberry tree!?

Let's pretend still because it's fun.

Andrew says we had a mulberry tree growing  
up. We tried to move it from the front yard to  
the back yard.



Jesus says, how'd it go?

Well, it was the hardest job my dad and me ever did. Actually it was the whole family. Started out with the two of us but the roots are ridiculous.

We got the tree moved but then the roots never really went away. Every year the tree came back in the same place.

And you see Jesus has a smirk on his face... indicating he's no idiot. He picked the mulberry tree on purpose.

Like I said, I know forgiveness is hard.

We think we're doing ok with a hurt from our past, we've extended kindness even to the person. We're able to interact with them but then the bitterness of forgiveness comes back and it's like it didn't move at all.

Oh yea... Andrew interrupts... the mulberry tree fruit is really bitter. I mean it's good and odd but you can only eat a little at a time.

Then another, let's say Matthew chimes in and says but Jesus, what about the other person who keeps hurting us?

Is there no punishment? No justice? It seems like forgiveness ends up being just about our feelings or our hurt and not about the wrong being done.

What would Jesus say to that? Here's what I think he would say. And it's what I would say and I believe it's what you understand as well.

Forgiveness is about healing. Forgiveness can be part of relationship repair but it is the healing part of the relationship repair.

Forgiveness is about healing the one who is hurt.

That's why Jesus says keep forgiving... it's not about them. It's about us and our hearts and the pain that we hold onto.

When we let go of hurt we free ourselves.

It's not our responsibility to free the other person. It's our responsibility to free ourselves.

It's about freeing ourselves from resentment and hurt and pain that eats away at us if we hold onto it.

When we let go, we are free. When we forgive, we are forgiven. When we give mercy, we receive mercy.

Blessed are the merciful for they will receive mercy.

When we withhold forgiveness, we aren't punishing the other person, we are punishing ourselves.

Now should there be good boundaries around forgiveness? Should we protect ourselves from further harm. Of course.

Forgiving does not mean we set ourselves up to have it happen all over again.

But Jesus knew that's what happens... and he knew that forgiveness is still about the one harmed not the one doing harm.

And so he said, keep forgiving. Why?

Free yourself. Unhook your own hurt and pain from the situation.

When pain has taken root in our hearts and our heads, we need to begin removing it like you remove a mulberry tree.

Root by root. And then back again the next year. Don't let it grow again.

And now we understand why they would have asked for faith.

But Jesus says it's not the quantity of faith.

Faith is a journey, not a belief. Faith is lived, one step at a time.

They didn't need more faith and neither do we. We just need to keep walking, keep digging, keep forgiving.

Blessed are the merciful for they will receive mercy.

Let us be people of mercy.