

## Waiting to Have Mercy

Sermon 2018-02-14 - Year B - Ash Wednesday - The Rev. Christopher M. Klukas

Joel 2:1–2, 12–17; Psalm 103:8–14; 2 Corinthians 5:20–6:10; Matthew 6:1–6, 16–21

- Bernie Madoff was one of the most well known and successful people in the field of investments, but on December 11, 2008 he became famous for another reason.
- On that day he revealed to his two sons that he had been running an elaborate Ponzi scheme for decades and that he had lost more than \$50 billion of his investors money.
- The next day his sons turned him in and he is still serving a 150 year prison sentence for securities fraud among other charges.
- On the radio the other day, I heard the story of a reporter who was able to earn Mr. Madoff's trust through phone calls to him in prison.
  - The reporter commented that this scam was not something that Bernie had to do. He was more than comfortable, and he lacked for nothing. Bernie, himself, is not entirely sure why he began the scam.
  - Once the scam got rolling, there was no way for him to get out of it. The lies built up, the secrecy deepened, and in the end there was no way for him to make things right.
  - The interviewer said that as Bernie recounted to him his confession to his two sons, he seemed like the confession was a relief to him.
  - All of that secrecy for so many years was weighing him down with the fear of exposure, once his crime was exposed, regardless of the consequences, it was a huge relief.

### The Day of the Lord

- The passage we read from Joel speaks of the Day of the Lord in terms of fear and trembling. Joel 2:1-2. Joel tells us that this is a day to fear because of God's wrath.
- This is the picture we sometimes get of God: that he is angry with us and waiting to punish us
  - It would be more accurate to say that God is waiting to have mercy on us.
  - That he misses us and he wants us to come back to him.
- Like Bernie Madoff, we often live in fear of having our sin exposed. We live in fear of dealing with the unknown consequences of what we have done.
  - Would people still love me if they knew who I really am?
  - Could God love me even though I am so full of sin?
- Bernie's family did forsake him, and he did end up in prison. His sin did have consequences. Sometimes the earthly consequences of our sin are deep and painful.
  - I don't know if Bernie knows the Lord or not, but I do know that regardless of the depths of his sin, God still loves him, and God can forgive him. And God can forgive you too.
- Joel reminds us that it doesn't have to be this way. We don't have to live in fear of the Day of the Lord. Joel 2:12-13.

- This is what this season of Lent is all about. Repenting, returning to the Lord.
  - God us not out to get you, he is waiting to have mercy on you.

### **A Day of Repentance**

- Today is a day of repentance, an opportunity for repentance.
- In a few moments, we will be reminded of our sinfulness and our mortality as we receive ashes on our foreheads along with the words “Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”
- After that we will move into a confession and litany of penitence where we will take an inventory of our sins confessing each one to the Lord.
- Finally, we will receive a declaration of God’s forgiveness, and this is where the joy begins.
- As a friend of mine says, “if your repentance doesn't bring you joy, you're doing it wrong.” - Geoff Mackey
- When we unload the baggage of our sin, the weight is lifted and we bear it no more.
  - Don’t let your sins burden you any longer.
  - Don’t let your guilt build up until it is an unbearable load.
  - Don’t live in fear of the day of the Lord.
- *“For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”* (2 Corinthians 5:21, ESV)
  - Jesus is the one who has already paid the penalty for us. He has exchanged our sinfulness for his righteousness. He is the one who makes all things new, and that includes you!
- *“The LORD is full of compassion and mercy, slow to anger and of great kindness... 12 As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our sins from us.”* (Psalm 103: 8, 12, BCP 1979).
  - God is waiting to have mercy on you, so what are you waiting for?
  - Let us joyfully cast our burdens on Jesus and return home to our heavenly Father.