

MERCIFUL

THE LESSON: JONAH 3-4

The opening petitions of the Litany (sometimes referred to as “the invocations”, meaning “callings”) repeat the phrase “Have mercy upon us”. Why is this? In brief, it is because we *need* mercy, but it is also because it’s in God’s very character to *be* merciful.

Mercy is all about compassion and forgiveness. When we ask God for mercy, we are recognizing that we are sinful and part of a sinful world, and that God would be justified in leaving us to the consequences of that sin: Yikes! So praying to God for mercy is first of all an acknowledgment that we need his compassion and forgiveness.

This appeal to God for mercy is one that pops up again and again in scripture, especially in the psalms and in the Gospels. Consider King David’s words: “Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions” (Psalm 51:1). Or consider the two blind men who called out to Jesus, saying, “Have mercy on us, Son of David” (Matthew 9:27). As it happens, King David was forgiven, and the two blind men were healed. These passages and so many like them tell us that our petitions do not fall on deaf ears.

Our God is a merciful God. When we ask for God’s mercy, we are appealing to his very character. The psalms say, “You, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness” (86:15). St. John’s first epistle says, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1:9).

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We’re going to take a look at a passage from the short Old Testament book of Jonah. Here’s the scoop: Jonah was a prophet in Israel. That means it was his job to take God’s message wherever God sent him. But God decided to send Jonah to the foreign city of Nineveh, a place notorious for evil, and Jonah didn’t want to go. After some creative convincing, Jonah did go and do what God commanded. Check out what happened next.

AT-HOME CHALLENGE

Each morning and evening, follow your own rule of prayer.

(IF YOU DON’T HAVE ONE, TRY SAYING THE MORNING AND EVENING PRAYERS FROM THE “FORMS OF PRAYER TO BE USED IN FAMILIES”, WHICH BEGINS ON PAGE 728 OF THE BCP. IF YOU DON’T HAVE A COPY, YOU CAN LOOK IT UP HERE: [HTTP://PRAYERBOOK.CA/RESOURCES/BCPONLINE/FAMILY-PRAYER.](http://prayerbook.ca/resources/bcponline/family-prayer))

Spend some time considering your own need for God’s compassion and forgiveness and slowly repeat the words, “*Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner*”. Next, sit in silence, recalling to mind that our God is a merciful God. Read aloud the words of 1 John 1:9: “*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness*”. Finally, identify those people that you struggle to feel compassion for, and ask God to help you to have a heart like his towards them, one that desires their repentance and God’s mercy.

- AND/OR -

Take some time to pray through this collect.

O God, who declarest thy almighty power most chiefly in showing mercy and pity: Mercifully grant unto us such a measure of thy grace, that we, running the way of thy commandments, may obtain thy gracious promises, and be made partakers of thy heavenly treasure; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

(THE COLLECT FOR THE ELEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY, BCP PAGE 234)

MERCIFUL

JONAH 3-4: **MERCY, EVEN FOR NINEVEH**

3 ¹Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time, saying, ²“Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it the message that I tell you.” ³So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, three days’ journey in breadth. ⁴Jonah began to go into the city, going a day’s journey. And he called out, “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!” ⁵And the people of Nineveh believed God. They called for a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them. ⁶The word reached the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. ⁷And he issued a proclamation and published through Nineveh, “By the decree of the king and his nobles: Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything. Let them not feed or drink water, ⁸but let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and let them call out mightily to God. Let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands. ⁹Who knows? God may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger, so that we may not perish.”

¹⁰When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it.

4 ¹But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry. ²And he prayed to the Lord and said, “O Lord, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster. ³Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live.” ⁴And the Lord said, “Do you do well to be angry?... ¹¹And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?”