

The Things That Matter Most

I wrecked the family car, an old gold minivan
 that had traveled every inch of I-95. It had worn cushions
 and an old school map in the glove box.
 It held a folder full of mix CDs under the passenger seat
 and every memory of every family trip,
 and I wrecked it.
 I called the tow truck while the engine
 hissed and smoked. I called my dad,
 my own apologies tripping over themselves
 to get to the front of the line.
 I expected to be grounded.
 I expected a “How could you?”
 But when I got home that night,
 my dad held me close and said,
 “A car is just a car, but you are my child.
 The only thing that matters is that you are okay.”
 And I knew it for what it was.
 It was mercy. It was love.
 It was the thing that mattered most.

Poem by
 Rev. Sarah Speed

Let Us Remember

ADELAIDE (“Have Thine Own Way”)

Words: Anna Strickland (2025)

Music: George C. Stebbins (1907)



Scan to hear
 the tune!



What is im - por - tant? What mat - ters more?
 We've been shown mer - cy all of our lives
 Fol - low - ing Je - sus, liv - ing in truth
 What does the Lord re - qui - re of us?



Hu - man con - nec - tion or keep - ing score?
 By the cre - a - tor of hu - man - kind
 We re - main faith - ful to our roots
 To re - main hum - ble, lov - ing, and just



In our pur - suit of jus - tice and truth
 So when we're in a po - si - tion to judge
 When those roots lead us out - side the lines
 Keep - ing the heart of the gos - pel in mind



Let us re - mem - ber: we fall short, too
 Let us re - mem - ber: they're just like us
 Let us re - mem - ber: faith is a - live
 Let us re - mem - ber: do what is right

Read John 8:2-11; Matthew 23:23

Commentary | Rev. Lizzie McManus-Dail

The Inconvenience of Mercy

The inconvenience of mercy is that it's hardly ever merited.

But good grief, does Jesus talk ad nauseam about mercy in the Bible; perhaps most famously telling his disciples—to their great chagrin—they must forgive their siblings seventy-seven times for the same sin (Matthew 18:21-22). He calls the merciful blessed in the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:7). And then there are his words as he is dying, on a cross, surrounded by criminals and his weeping mother and the mob that lynched him: “Father, forgive them” (Luke 23:34). In John 8:2-11, he embodies mercy with a woman whom I am rather inclined to think has received little mercy in her life, but that's my own protective instincts kicking in for women in patriarchal places. It's entirely possible she “deserves” little of what Jesus is offering her.

Mercy—unmerited, inadvisably offered, and brimming with foolish hope—is the making of a Christ-follower.

It's not that I think practicing mercy is particularly easy.

I doubt Jesus would talk so much about forgiveness and mercy if it were easy—God tends to repeat what we struggle to listen to. No, mercy is brutal.

Mercy is what we ask for when we have messed up so mightily in our relationships, our marriages, our parenting, our friendships, that we face either the death of that relationship or the death of who we thought we were. Perhaps this is the kind of death this woman had experienced in her home, and the anger of the crowd was merely reflective of how hurt they were to see a home torn apart. Maybe she had been dealt a death-dealing marriage and was looking for escape. How dare she, then, receive. . . mercy?

And yet, mercy makes no sense. It is not logical, or equally beneficial. Mercy does not make us money or make us look good. But mercy is what makes us God's own.

The receiving and extending of mercy in the most awful and improbable of places is what makes me know that God is still at work in this world. **Mercy is a practice of hoping and knowing that there is more than the thing that hurts us—more than the thing that haunts us.**

This, too, is how mercy is part of God's justice, for God's justice is God's joy. God's justice does not align with our human metrics of justice and punishment. God's justice is the delight God feels at the lost sheep coming home, the coin being found. God's goodness is not retributive. God's goodness is rooted in goodness propagating in the face of death.

Which is, perhaps, why Jesus tells her: *Go. Sin no more. And live.*

Reflect

Recount a time when you received mercy. How did it feel?

Fifth Sunday in Lent

the good news is... rooted in justice, mercy, & faithfulness

Read John 8:2-11

Artist Statement | Rev. T. Denise Anderson

I often wonder about the backstory of the woman from John 8:2-11. What were her circumstances? How did they “catch” her in the act of adultery? *In flagrante delicto?*²⁰ Was it less graphic than that? Was she allowed to explain herself? Did she protest? If she was about to be stoned, what happened to the person with whom she was accused? Was this a loving relationship? Was it even consensual?

Whatever her story, the Pharisees bring her to Jesus expecting him to uphold the law’s punitive prescription. Jesus knows it’s a trap. If he concurs with the law, he initiates and must bear witness to an act of extreme brutality that would traumatize anyone who had to watch. If he counters the law, he’s a heretic and should probably be stoned himself. But he outsmarts them and turns their self-righteousness and rage back onto them.

In what should have been the end of her life’s story, this woman now finds herself standing. Whole. Alive. Freed to a new future. And through it all, Jesus is just drawing on the ground—like you do!

I wanted to show this woman standing in her wholeness, right after the crowds have dispersed and right before Jesus rises to meet her as an equal. She’s backlit in a way that suggests the sun has set, indicating the end of a saga. What will she do at the end of a nightmare with a new life ahead of her? What decisions do we face at the dawn of a second chance?

Look

Contemplate the woman in the image. What do you imagine is her backstory? What do you dream for her future?



Epilogue | T. Denise Anderson
14"x18" Acrylic on canvas

²⁰ This is a Latin phrase often used in legal contexts that can be translated to: “in the very act of committing an offense.”

Fifth Sunday in Lent

the good news is... rooted in justice, mercy, & faithfulness

Read Matthew 23:23

Artist Statement | Hannah Garrity



There is Good | Hannah Garrity
18"x18" Hand-dyed and collaged newspaper with paper lace overlay

In this series of scriptures, gathered crowds drew my attention.²¹ Jesus always drew a crowd, but so did the voices of hate in his time. In our current historic moment, this dichotomy of crowds for justice and crowds for injustice confounds me. Are all crowds worthy of joining? In the background of this piece, I dyed and collaged together torn newspaper, representing the fabric of the world, to portray the cacophony of crowds gathering. What is drawing them in? Is everything that compels us to gather right and good? No.

The clarity comes in this scripture: "For you tithe mint, dill, and cumin and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith" (Matthew 23:23). Most especially, in the context of Jesus denouncing the scribes and Pharisees, the crucial point is that gathering to enact justice *is* good and gathering to enact injustice *is not*.

The crowd depicted in this artwork is inspired by the 100,000 who gathered strong in Budapest, Hungary, in June, 2025. The Hungarian parliament had outlawed Pride as part of a larger systemic effort to take away the rights of the LGBTQIA+ community in Hungary, and a "wider effort to curb democratic freedoms ahead of a hotly contested national election next year."²²

In the four corners of the artwork, symbols of justice, mercy, and faithfulness echo the clarity of Jesus. Gathering for justice *is* the work of the gospel.

Look

If you could place yourself in this image, where would you be and why?

²¹ In Matthew 23, Jesus is preaching to the crowds and disciples, denouncing the hypocrisy of many religious leaders.

²² Rutai, Lili. "Tens of thousands defy Hungary's ban on Pride in protest against Orbán." The Guardian. June 28, 2025. [theguardian.com/world/2025/jun/28/tens-of-thousands-defy-hungarys-ban-on-pride-in-protest-against-orban](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/jun/28/tens-of-thousands-defy-hungarys-ban-on-pride-in-protest-against-orban).