

Sermon Draft

Text: 1 Timothy 2:1–15

Sermon: “Have Mercy”

Suppose you heard that a high-ranking monarch was coming to your town and he wanted to speak to you, one-on-one, in a private audience. What would you say? In the ancient world, people ran out to meet their king and cried, “Lord (that is, Sir), have mercy.” The prayer anticipated several days of feasting with the king, talking with him, and even receiving gifts. Today, we actually use such a prayer. We know it as the Kyrie: “Lord, have mercy.” It’s foundational for several hymns, including the hymn “Kyrie! God, Father” (LSB 942). (Invite the congregation to look at the hymn.) Here is a threefold prayer to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, where we see that it is only through Christ, our mediator at the heavenly throne, that we poor sinners can pray, “Lord Have Mercy!”

Today is September 22. Most of us are old enough to remember the terrorist attacks of 9/11. It was about this time, late September 2001, that people around the world gathered in massive prayer services, offering petitions for everyone from the victims to the highest earthly authorities. But many gathered under the curious assumption that all faiths pray to the same God. Perhaps the familiar word “father” will help clarify that here. The Islamic religion has no father. The modern Jewish religion has a childless father. Only Christians pray to the Father through his Son. If we are going to pray for folks in high positions, politicians and presidents, kings and monarchs to whom shall we pray? And if we poor sinners are powerless to change the world, as so many of us felt powerless sitting helplessly by our TV screens on 9/11, to whom shall we pray?

We pray to the One who is in the highest position of them all, God the Father, who is the Maker and Keeper of all things: “Kyrie, God, Father in heaven!”

The word Kyrie means “lord,” so it’s meant for subjects (some would say peasants!) to bring to their kings and others in high positions when asking for gifts: “Lord, have mercy.” See the boundless mercy and grace of God, our heavenly Father! He welcomes our supplications, as we ask him for all his gifts for our body and soul. Our heavenly Father welcomes our intercessions for our neighbor and for all who are in need. He desires our thanksgivings for all he gives to us. This is pleasing in his sight, for he wants everyone to receive his gifts of grace.

“Kyrie! God, Father in heaven above, You abound in gracious love, Of all things the maker and preserver. Eleison! (Have mercy!)” (LSB 942).

And yet, how are we poor sinners, who are by nature alienated from God and unable to stand in his presence, able to pray to him? Two closely related words paint a rich portrait of Christ, who alone is our way to the Father: ransom and mediator.

A ransom is the price to set slaves free—you and I born into spiritual slavery and bondage to sin and death. To this bondage, we have added by our fault, by our own fault, by our own most grievous fault. But Christ became the slave to set all slaves free by his own death. He willingly left his Father's throne, abdicated to the lowest possible status, yes, even to death on the cross. He gladly did it all to set us free and to make us God's own heir, one who gets an inheritance of forgiveness, life, and salvation.

One hymn puts it this way: ***“[Jesus’] blood, that sprinkled price, So we might be assured That our inheritance in light Has been secured”*** (LSB 564:4).

And because Christ has done it all for us, we are free to pray to the Father, confident that our Mediator, risen from the dead and ascended to his heavenly throne, faithfully intercedes for us. Paul says, ***“There is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus”*** (v 5). Recall that Jesus prayed to his Father in every hour of need, whether for himself or for his people.

On the eve of his Passion, he prayed for himself, for his disciples, and for all the world (John 17). And now, richest and purest gospel, the risen and living Christ still prays for us! Christ is our go-between, the One who stands between the Church and the Father to pray with uplifted, nail-pierced hands—for us in every need.

“Kyrie! O Christ, our king . . . Our mediator at the heavenly throne: Hear our cry and grant our supplication. Eleison! (Have mercy!)”
(LSB 942).

And so, we pray to the Father through the Son. But there is one more person who is hard at work for us and for our salvation. See our need, dearly beloved, for the work of the Holy Spirit in our prayer life! Paul mentions the fall of Adam and Eve, and what it means for our life in the Spirit. Adam was formed first. Eve was deceived. Both fell headlong into sin and death, and we fell with them. Yes, you and I have inherited Adam’s sin, and we have also participated every time we have reached for the forbidden fruits that God himself has told us through his commandments ***“Thou shalt not!”***

Yet the Church (the Second Eve) will be saved through the single most important birth of them all, the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ (the Second Adam). Here is redemption for all of Adam's descendants, whom Christ, the Second Adam, has delivered and to whom he has sent the Holy Spirit.

Paul then describes our life in the Spirit, including guidelines on what to wear and what not to wear to church, right down to gold and pearls and costly attire from Macy's and Nordstrom's. Now what do we, who are justified by grace through faith (not by our clothing!), make of these instructions? In short, everything in the house of God shows forth the presence of Christ among those who are justified by grace through faith. We conduct ourselves with the understanding that this is the place where Christ is present in the Means of Grace. And in all these things, the Holy Spirit is hard at work to keep us in the Christian faith, even to the end of days.

“Kyrie! O God the Holy Ghost, Guard our faith, the gift we need the most, And bless our life’s last hour . . . Eleison! (Have mercy!)”

(LSB 942).

We began with St. Paul’s admonition to pray ***“for kings and all who are in high positions”*** (1 Timothy 2:2), which we do every Sunday. But I’d like to close with the good news that, every once in a while, royals pray for us. Consider, for instance, the following prayer of King Henry VI, which is rooted in the work of the Trinity and ends with the Kyrie: **“Lord Jesus Christ, who created, redeemed, and preordained me to be this that I am, you know what you wish to do with me; do with me in accordance with your will, with mercy.”** This is most certainly true! In terms that we have explored today, it is only through Christ, our Mediator at the heavenly throne, that we pray, “Lord, have mercy!”

Amen