

KICKING IT OFF

What's the worst day you've ever experienced?

BIG IDEA

Jesus' resurrection brought a brand new day that changes everything.

KEY SCRIPTURES

John 8:2-11

"One day Jesus was teaching a crowd outside the Temple, and some Pharisees brought a woman who was caught in adultery. They put her on display in front of the crowd, then said to Jesus. "This woman has been caught in the act of adultery. The law of Moses says to stone her. So what do YOU say?" They were trying to trap Jesus into saying something they could use against him, but Jesus stooped down and started writing in the dirt with his finger. They kept badgering Jesus, demanding an answer. Finally, Jesus stood up and said, "Here's my answer: If any one of you has never sinned, then you may throw the first stone." Then he stooped down again and continued writing in the dirt. When the accusers heard this, they began to slip away, one by one, beginning with the oldest, until it was just Jesus and the woman. At that point, Jesus stood back up and quietly said to her, "Where are your accusers? Is there no one left to condemn you?" "No one, Lord," she said. Then Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you! Now go on, and leave your sinful ways."

John 5:2-9

"In Jerusalem, near the Sheep Gate, was the pool of Bethesda, which was surrounded by five covered porches. A large crowd of all sorts of disabled people would lie by the pool, waiting for a miracle. There was a legend that every once in a while an angel would stir up the water, and whoever was the first to get in the water while it was still moving would get what they needed and be made whole. One poor man had been

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waiting by the pool for 38 years. When Jesus saw this man and heard that he'd been lying there for such a long time, he asked the man "Do you want to get well?" "Sir," the man replied, "I have no one to help me get into the pool when the water is stirred. While I'm trying to get there, somebody else always gets ahead of me!" Then Jesus simply said, "Stand up, pick up your mat, and start walking!" When the man trusted Jesus, he was immediately able to walk again."

Luke 23:39-43

"One of the criminals being executed on a cross beside Jesus ridiculed him saying, "If you're supposed to be the Messiah, why don't you save yourself . . . and us too!" But the second criminal rebuked him, "Man, don't you even fear God when you're dying? We deserve to die for our evil deeds, but this man hasn't done anything wrong." Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom." And Jesus replied, "I guarantee you that today you will be with me in paradise."

Acts 2:21 LB

"Anyone who asks for mercy from the Lord shall have it and shall be saved."

Matthew 28:1,6 NLT

"Early on Sunday morning, as the new day was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went out to visit the tomb . . . The angel said "He is risen!"

Luke 1:78 GW

"A new day will dawn on us because our God is loving and merciful."

DISCUSSION

Easter means it's a new day of mercy "because our God is loving and merciful". This week we are diving into two questions: When do I need God's mercy and what happens when I accept it? I need God's mercy when I'm:

- Ashamed: I need God's mercy when I've messed up. God's mercy forgives and frees me from guilt.
 - Angry: I need God's mercy when I don't have what I need. God's mercy makes the impossible possible.
 - Afraid: I need God's mercy when I'm facing death. God's mercy will save me for eternity.
1. Read John 8:2-11. The woman in this story was ashamed. How did Jesus treat her? How did he treat the Pharisees? How did he not treat her in verse 11? What was the result?
 2. Discuss a time when you've been filled with shame. Is/was it difficult to receive God's mercy in the midst of that shame? Does this passage help you in that?
 3. How can you offer mercy to someone who is in the midst of their own shame?
 4. Read John 5:2-9. The paralytic was struggling with anger because he wasn't able to get down to the water to receive healing. What was Jesus' response to this man? How did Jesus make the impossible possible in his life?
 5. How has your anger kept you from God's mercy?
 6. If comfortable, share with your group an "impossible" problem you are currently facing and what makes it impossible.
 7. Share an experience of God's mercy making the impossible possible.
 8. Read Luke 23:39-43. The second criminal in this story was afraid of what he was about to face- death. How did his fear help draw him to Jesus?
 9. Read Acts 2:21. Think about the first criminal's response in Luke 23:42-43. What is it that keeps us from asking for Christ's mercy? Why is this so hard for non-believers? How would you explain to someone how to accept Christ's mercy?
 10. Read Matthew 28:1,6 and Luke 1:78. What does that passage and the message title "It's a New Day of Mercy" mean to you?
 11. In his Easter message, Pastor Jeff defined mercy as "undeserved forgiveness and unearned kindness." Discuss what has to be done to receive this wonderful gift of mercy from God, and what it can mean to each of us in this chaotic world.

WRAPPING IT UP

Spend some time praying for one another, that you will be able to receive God's mercy even in your shame, anger and fear. And that you will be dispensers of that mercy into the lives of others.

MEMORY VERSE

"A new day will dawn on us because our God is loving and merciful." **Luke 1:78 GW**

PRAYER FOCUS

Pray for all who had the opportunity to watch our Easter service, that God's mercy will wash over them and transform their lives as they receive that mercy.

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Who's the most unlikely person that God has used to bless your life?

BIG IDEA

Through his mercy, God can use all of us for His purpose to minister to others, regardless of our past.

KEY SCRIPTURES

Ephesians 2:10 LB

"It is God himself who has made us what we are and given us new lives from Christ Jesus; and long ages ago he planned that we should spend these lives in helping others."

Romans 6:13 LEB

"Give yourselves completely to God – every part of you – because you've been brought from death to life, and now you want to be used by God for good, and for his righteous purposes."

2 Corinthians 4:2 NLT

"We don't try to trick anyone. Instead we ... show everyone who we really are. Then they can know in their hearts what kind of people we are in God's sight."

Romans 8:15 (NCV)

"The Spirit we receive does not make us slaves to fear; it makes us children of God."

2 Corinthians 4:5 GW

"Our message is not about ourselves. It is about Jesus Christ as the Lord. We are your servants for his sake."

2 Corinthians 4:7

"But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us."

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Romans 6:13 LEB

"Give yourselves completely to God – every part of you – because you've been brought from death to life, and now you want to be used by God for good, and for his righteous purposes."

DISCUSSION

The greatest joy and thrill in life is being used by God for purposes greater than ourselves. It's what we were created for, so it always feels good. Unfortunately, many people feel unworthy because of past behavior, or unqualified due to lack of training. But through his mercy, God can use all of us for His purpose to minister to others, regardless of our past. Today's discussion centers around how God wants our lives to have eternal significance as we serve him with authenticity (not acting like someone else) while remembering that our message is not about ourselves – it is about Jesus Christ as Lord.

1. Read Ephesians 2:10 and Romans 6:13. What do these passages teach about how God uses people? What insight does this give you for your purpose?
2. In Sunday's message, Pastor Jeff said, "Every saint has a past and every sinner has a future." Discuss how you see this playing out in your life and the lives of others.
3. Read 2 Corinthians 4:2. Why do you think it is important to be authentic when God wants to use us for his purpose?
4. What is problematic with trying to model our behavior after a successful person or mimic the behavior of someone else who is serving God well?
5. Reflect on areas of your life where you would be uncomfortable if you were truly real with others. How could sharing these aspects of your life set you free or help someone else?
6. Read Romans 8:15. For people who consider letting God use them, fears about problems they had earlier in their lives are often serious impediments. What are some things such people might be afraid of? How do you think God feels about this?
7. Read 2 Corinthians 4:5. God's plan for using us is for Jesus' sake – it's not about us. How can understanding this motivate you to serve others?
8. Read 2 Corinthians 4:7. We should know that we are just vessels for conveying God's message, and that God has the real power. But we sometimes think we are the treasure and the power comes from us. Why do you think we get confused about this?
9. How does knowing that God's power is on display in our weakness encourage you to allow Him to use you – warts and all?

WRAPPING IT UP

Consider how you might give yourself more fully to God to be used for His purpose.

MEMORY VERSE

"Give yourselves completely to God – every part of you – because you've been brought from death to life, and now you want to be used by God for good, and for his righteous purposes." **Romans 6:13 LEB**

PRAYER FOCUS

Pray for those who are working in health care, attending to the sick during these trying times, and for those who know Christ to be able to share the hope they have.

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How do you tend to deal with your own failures?

BIG IDEA

Jesus responds to our failures with His mercy.

KEY SCRIPTURES

1 Peter 1:3

"Because of his great mercy God has given us a new life by raising Jesus Christ from death. This fills us with a living hope."

1 Peter 5:7

"Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you."

Hebrews 7:25

"Jesus is able to save us completely because he lives to intercede on our behalf. He is always talking to the Father, asking him to help us."

John 21:1-14

"Afterward Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Galilee. It happened this way: Simon Peter, Thomas (also known as Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. "I'm going out to fish," Simon Peter told them, and they said, "We'll go with you." So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus. He called out to them, "Friends, haven't you any fish?" "No," they answered. He said, "Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some." When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish. Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" As soon as Simon Peter

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heard him say, "It is the Lord," he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water. The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards. When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread. Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish you have just caught." So Simon Peter climbed back into the boat and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." None of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord. Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead."

Matthew 27:3-5

"When Judas, who had betrayed him, saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse and returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders. 4 "I have sinned," he said, "for I have betrayed innocent blood." "What is that to us?" they replied. "That's your responsibility." So Judas threw the money into the temple and left. Then he went away and hanged himself."

DISCUSSION

Because we're imperfect people living in an imperfect world we all experience failures in life. The night Jesus was arrested, two of his closest friends had massive failures: Judas betrayed him and Peter denied him. It was the same sin, just expressed in different ways. Today's discussion center around what causes our personal failures. Like Peter, we

- overestimate our own strength
- fear the disapproval of others
- speak without thinking

Peter, however, did three things right. He 1) grieved his failure, 2) let his small group support him, and 3) cast himself on God's mercy. Let's discuss what Jesus does with our failures:

1. Of the three common reasons for personal failure listed above, with which do you most struggle?
2. Read 1 Peter 1:3 and 1 Peter 5:7. Peter shares from his own perspective about God's mercy and what we should do to receive it. How can we follow Peter's advice?
3. Read Hebrews 7:25. Take a moment together to absorb the full weight of the fact that Jesus prays for us. Can you picture Jesus in heaven praying for you right now? How could understanding this verse influence your response to failures?
4. Read John 21:1-14 and Matthew 27:3-5. Imagine the first scene. Peter has betrayed Jesus, yet two short weeks later, Jesus helps the disciples to fish, cooks them breakfast, and serves them. Would you do this for someone who had betrayed you? Discuss your thoughts.
5. Consider the two responses to failure. Judas gave up and Peter looked to God. Share a time when failure has led you to respond like Judas or like Peter. How did the results compare?
6. Notice in the John 1 passage that Peter does not isolate himself after his failure, but Jesus finds him with the other disciples fishing. What does this tell you about the power of community to help us in our failures?
7. Jesus uses our individual and collective failures to build his church. What failure(s) in your past does God want to use to help others?

WRAPPING IT UP

How might you be an encouragement someone who has failed, inviting them into your fellowship and to receive God's mercy?

MEMORY VERSE

"Because of his great mercy God has given us a new life by raising Jesus Christ from death. This fills us with a living hope". 1 Peter 1:3

PRAYER FOCUS

Pray for our Celebrate Recovery and Jail ministries; that people can comprehend how God can use their failures for His good.

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Who is your favorite secret agent and why?

BIG IDEA

One of the ways you fulfill your life purpose is to show mercy to others.

KEY SCRIPTURES

Acts 1:8

"You will be my witnesses..."

Ephesians 4:2b LB

"Be patient with each other, making allowances for each other's faults because of your love."

Colossians 4:6 NCV

"When you talk, you should always be kind and pleasant so you will be able to answer everyone in the way you should."

Galatians 6:2

"Carry each other's burdens

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and in this way you fulfill the law of Christ."

2 Corinthians 2:7

"When people sin, you should forgive them and comfort them, so they won't give up in despair."

DISCUSSION

God's mercy towards us is never-ending. And as followers of Christ, we are called to be agents of mercy. We don't have to convince anyone, but simply share with others about the many times God has shown us His mercy in our lives.

1. Read Acts 1:8. What comes to mind as you read those words?
2. Read Ephesians 4:2b. Share how you would show mercy to someone who annoys you with their offensive or sinful behavior?
3. Give an example of how you might show mercy and love by not being judgmental of another's sins.
4. Read Colossians 4:6. What words of encouragement would you use when speaking to others to help them consider reaching out to God? How can you refrain from being abrasive so you can have a godly influence on someone's life?
5. Read Galatians 6:2. Reflect on a time when someone helped carry your burden. What emotions did you feel?
6. How can this experience help you carry someone else's burden?
7. If Jesus puts someone in your life every day who needs God's love, where can you change your life to become more

aware of these divine opportunities?

8. Read 2 Corinthians 2:7. Why is it sometimes difficult to comfort people who sin? How does your attitude change when you think about the times you've been forgiven when you stumbled and failed?
9. What practical steps can you take to find the courage to offer forgiveness and reassurance to those who need it?
10. In what ways can your mercy change someone's destiny? Conversely, how can extending God's mercy change your destiny to help you grow more Christ-like?

WRAPPING IT UP

Each of you determine one person who most needs mercy from you. Pray for one another, that you might show them the mercy that Christ has shown you.

MEMORY VERSE

"Be patient with each other, making allowances for each other's faults because of your love." **Ephesians 4:2b LB**

PRAYER FOCUS

Pray for those who are hospitalized during this pandemic and for their families who cannot be present with them.