

Sermon – *Mercy in Action – Again & Again!* – (36.5 minutes allowed)

(Part of the Series: *Follow: Journey with Jesus in Mark's Gospel*)

INTRODUCTION (7.0 minutes):

- 1) Greeting & Background:
 - a) Good morning! My name is Pastor John Reddy. It is both a joy and a privilege to share from the Word of God with you today.
 - b) Whether you are here at the Caron Theater or joining us online from home, it is my prayer that the Word of the Lord penetrates our hearts in faith and action.
 - c) For a number of weeks now, we have been learning how to “Follow” as we’ve “Journeyed with Jesus in Mark’s Gospel”.
 - d) Several weeks ago, Pastor Tanner shared from Mark 6:1-6 where Jesus is rejected in his hometown despite the clear power in his teaching. We learned that:
 - i) Faith sees past the surface.
 - ii) It rejoices in the work of God and elevates the honor of Jesus.
 - iii) Faith not only unlocks the power of God but it also moves the heart of Jesus.
 - e) Concluding, Pastor Turley rightfully asked us, “Is Jesus marveling at your faith?”
 - f) The following week, Pastor Chasteen continued with Mark 6:7-29 where the disciples were “Surprisingly Sent” and challenge to demonstrate that kind of faith. They were to:
 - i) Go in the authority of Jesus – all the while Trusting in the provision of Jesus.
 - ii) Clearly, they were to imitate the ministry of Jesus – even as they counted the cost of following Jesus but... always operating in the confidence of God’s unstoppable mission.
 - g) Concluding, Pastor Chasteen reminded us that we too, like the original disciples are to “Live Everyday Sent”. As followers of Jesus, we are to live in the “Multiplication Middle” where we live WITH JESUS in presence and intimacy even as we are SENT BY JESUS to those cares about deeply (use my body and mimic Jon’s body movements).
 - h) And that brings us to this morning’s reading with three stories from Mark 6:30-56 where Jesus does a bit of a “Pop Quiz” or “Checkback” with the disciples.
 - i) We see the quality of their faith applied as Pastor Tanner illustrated.
 - ii) And, we see their struggles living in the “Multiplication Middle” – being “With Jesus” and, simultaneously “Living Sent”.
 - i) In the process of these tests, Jesus reveals his heart of deep compassion and merciful action towards those disciples as well as the ones that they are SENT to.
 - j) I trust that as we consider their stories that we’ll discover our next steps in our spiritual journey as well.
- 2) Scripture Reading:
 - a) So, if you will open your Bibles and turn on your Smart Phones to today’s text from the Gospel of Mark, Chapter 6. We’ll read beginning at verse 30. [Pause]
 - b) Jesus Feeds the 5,000:

³⁰ The apostles returned to Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught. ³¹ And he said to them, “Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while.” For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. ³² And they went away in the boat to a desolate place by themselves. ³³ Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they ran there on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. ³⁴ When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. And he began to teach them many things. ³⁵ And when it grew late, his disciples came to him and said, “This is a desolate place, and the hour is now late. ³⁶ Send them away to go into the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat.” ³⁷ But he answered them, “You give them something to eat.” And they

said to him, “Shall we go and buy two hundred denarii^[1] worth of bread and give it to them to eat?” ³⁸ And he said to them, “How many loaves do you have? Go and see.” And when they had found out, they said, “Five, and two fish.” ³⁹ Then he commanded them all to sit down in groups on the green grass. ⁴⁰ So they sat down in groups, by hundreds and by fifties. ⁴¹ And taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and said a blessing and broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples to set before the people. And he divided the two fish among them all. ⁴² And they all ate and were satisfied. ⁴³ And they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish. ⁴⁴ And those who ate the loaves were five thousand men.

c) Jesus Walks on Water:

⁴⁵ Immediately he made his disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. ⁴⁶ And after he had taken leave of them, he went up on the mountain to pray. ⁴⁷ And when evening came, the boat was out on the sea, and he was alone on the land. ⁴⁸ And he saw that they were making headway painfully, for the wind was against them. And about the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea. He meant to pass by them, ⁴⁹ but when they saw him walking on the sea they thought it was a ghost, and cried out, ⁵⁰ for they all saw him and were terrified. But immediately he spoke to them and said, “**Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid.**” ⁵¹ And he got into the boat with them, and the wind ceased. And they were utterly astounded, ⁵² for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened.

d) Jesus Heals the Sick in Gennesaret:

⁵³ When they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret and moored to the shore. ⁵⁴ And when they got out of the boat, the people immediately recognized him ⁵⁵ and ran about the whole region and began to bring the sick people on their beds to wherever they heard he was. ⁵⁶ And wherever he came, in villages, cities, or countryside, they laid the sick in the marketplaces and implored him that they might touch even the fringe of his garment. And as many as touched it were made well.

3) Prayer of Consecration:

a) Would you bow your heads and repeat after me as I pray:

i) Heavenly Father... Speak to My Heart... And Change my Life... Amen...

MAIN BODY – Teaching – Encouragement #1: (6 of 12 minutes):

- 1) Throughout Mark’s Gospel a recurrent question raised by those witnessing the amazing teaching, miracles, and ministry of Jesus was, “Who IS this man?” Some spoke from confusion; some spoke from objection; some spoke from hopeful faith. Perhaps some of you here at MHS or joining us through our livestream are asking that very question.
- 2) Well, our three stories today offer some more insight into that question. Let me explain.
- 3) My first encouragement today is that the Jesus that we read about today is the one “*who sees the needs of others – through His compassionate heart*”.
- 4) What do we see when we look back at the text?
- 5) In our first story beginning in verse 34, despite seeking solitude and rest, Jesus comes ashore and sees a “*great crowd... and he had compassion on them...*” (vs 34).
 - a) Why? Why did Jesus have an emotional jolt upon seeing them? [Pause]
- 6) Well, Mark tells us: “*...because they were like a sheep without a shepherd.*” (vs 34).
 - a) This echoes the time when Moses (understanding he would not see the Promised Land) asked God to appoint someone to succeed him and lead Israel out of the wilderness “*that the congregation of the Lord may not be as sheep that have no shepherd*” (Num 27:17).
 - b) Moses loved the people of Israel and rightfully recognize their need for godly, spiritual leadership.
- 7) Likewise, Jesus saw the spiritual need of the “great crowds” gathering.
 - a) This great need was not a new story. Many of the prophets had been instructed to confront failing Israel leaders.
 - b) Ezekiel had prophesied against the leaders of Israel before: “*The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the injured you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the*

lost you have not sought, and with force and harshness you have ruled them. So they were scattered; they wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. My sheep were scattered over all the face of the earth, with none to search or seek for them.” (Ezekiel 34:4-5).

- 8) And so, recognizing that this great need still existed, Jesus’ heart was moved.
 - a) He saw that the void of godly, spiritual leadership was leaving a great unmet void.
- 9) Similarly, Mark tells us in verse 48 that as the disciples were sailing across the water, Jesus “*saw that they were making headway painfully, for the wind was against them...*”.
 - a) Note: Headwinds...
 - b) Jesus was alert; He was “paying attention”; He was “looking out for them”.
 - c) As He went to them, he recognized their terror. He saw their need for rescue and physical safety. He saw their need for reassurance and emotional safety too.
- 10) Jesus’ capacity to see the needs of others and experience heartfelt compassion shouldn’t surprise us. As all four gospels attest, He was God-come-in-the-Flesh... The Immanuel of Christmas... God-with-Us...
- 11) And, because He is God, Jesus has all the attributes of God including the attribute or quality of Compassion. He doesn’t just “experience” compassion... He IS compassion! It’s part of His very nature.
 - a) The Psalmist declares: *But you, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.* [Psalm 86:15].
 - b) And, Lamentation records that: *The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.* [Lamentations 3:22-23]
 - c) *He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.* [Psalm 147:3]
 - d) We are reminded by Isaiah that: “*the LORD waits to be gracious to you, and therefore he exalts himself to show mercy to you*.” [Isaiah 30:18]
 - e) We are told in the Psalms that: *The LORD is good to all, and his mercy is over all that he has made.* [Psalm 145:9]
 - f) When confronting Israel, God tells Hosea that his “*compassion grows warm and tender.”* [Hosea 11:8-9]
 - g) The prophet Micah tells those who have struggled, “*He will again have compassion on us...”* [Micah 7:19]
- 12) I think that you “get the picture” - Jesus has compassion because He IS compassion...
 - a) and it never stops...
 - b) he delights in seizing opportunities to display compassion...
 - c) executed over all that He has created...
 - d) showing mercy brings pleasure and glory to His name...
 - e) it manifests who He fundamentally is...
 - f) it is warm, and tender, and available again and again...
 - g) and, therefore, Jesus sees us through His compassionate heart.
- 13) My prayer for us this morning is that we would have NO doubt about His great compassion for us – and for others....

MAIN BODY – Teaching – Encouragement #2: (6 of 12 minutes):

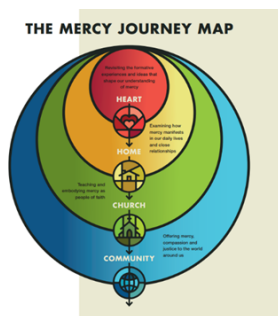
- 1) Which brings me to my 2nd brief encouragement: *Jesus unlocks the power of God in the midst of faithful deeds of mercy.*
- 2) Looking back to our gospel reading, when Jesus recognized that the “great crowd” was “like a sheep without a shepherd”, he not only responded by feeling compassion but he responded by **doing** compassion.
 - a) In light of their great spiritual need, Mark says that “he began to teach them many things.” [verse 34].
 - i) He assumes His role as the Good Shepherd of Psalm 23. “*He makes them lie down in green pastures... He restores [their] soul. He leads them in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake*” [Psalm 23:1-4]

- ii) He fulfills the intention of Jeremiah’s prophecy. *“I will set shepherds over them who will care for them, and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, neither shall any be missing, declares the Lord.”* [Jeremiah 23:4]
 - iii) For it is Jesus who declares, *“I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me...”* [John 10:14]
- 3) After a long day of teaching this “great crowd”, His disciples come to him pointing out an emerging crisis of “Food Insecurity” and a faithless proposition, *“³⁶ Send them away to go into the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat.”*
 - 4) Jesus first responds with a patient opportunity for His disciples to exercise faithful imitation of his observed compassion.
 - a) *“You give them something to eat”*, He says, for he clearly intended that they act upon what they’ve observed.
 - b) With a little sarcasm, for 200 denarii is a lot of money, they fail to capture the truth that when we serve others in the authority and compassion of Jesus, we can also trust in His provision with confidence.
 - c) They fail; and rather than let the need go unmet, Jesus acts in power.
 - 5) Through a powerful manifestation of the miraculous, He takes 5 loaves and 2 fishes, consecrates it as he looks to heaven and says a blessing, and then multiplies the little amount offered to meet the great physical need presented.
 - 6) More than 5000+ people gathered had their hunger abated that evening. As Mark put it, *“they all ate and were satisfied”* [vs 42] [Pause]
 - 7) When His disciples got into trouble crossing on water, we can see that Jesus not only observed their distress but that *“about the fourth watch of the night, he came to them...”* He left what He was doing and... moved to meet their need.
 - a) And, to initiate this act of mercy, he again performed the miraculous “walking on the sea”.
 - b) You would think that after seeing Jesus’ miracle of the feeding of the 5000 that they would have great confidence but... this was not the case... they were instead terrified. And so, in great acts of compassion, Jesus calls out to them personally and calms their emotional hearts, *“Take heart, it is I. Do not be afraid”*. [vs 50]
 - c) Mark records that as *“he got into the boat with them... the wind ceased”*. His mercy even extended to preserving their physical safety by commanding nature.
 - 8) Again and again... and again and again... and again and again...
 - a) we see Jesus encountering great need...
 - i) in individuals...
 - ii) in small groups, and...
 - iii) in great crowds...
 - b) And, because Jesus IS compassion... Jesus DOES compassion.
 - 9) The writer Mark ends this section of his gospel, beginning in verse 53, with a bit of a summary of this recurring reality.
 - a) Crossing over to Gennesaret, many people with great need see Him.
 - b) Word spreads and the sick are brought to wherever He is.
 - c) *56 And wherever he came, in villages, cities, or countryside, they laid the sick in the marketplaces and implored him that they might touch even the fringe of his garment. And as many as touched it were made well.*
 - d) I can’t help but wonder if while they were laying there, if the sick thought about The Good Shepherd:
 - i) *Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,^[c]
I will fear no evil,
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff,
they comfort me.* [Psalm 23:4]

- 10) My prayer for us this morning is that we see in Jesus the connection between “feeling” compassion and “doing” compassion. And, that we would trust God’s provision even as we step out in faith with whatever little we may think we have...

Main Body – Application – The Mercy Journey (4.0 min of 17.0 Minutes):

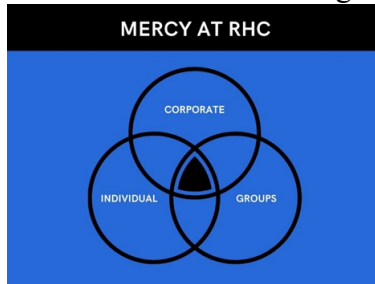
- 1) And that brings me to my Main Point: *Imitating the compassionate heart of Jesus, WE must recognize needs and offer faithful deeds of mercy – confident of His authority, provision, and power.*
- 2) Consider the parable of the “Good Samaritan” recorded in Luke’s gospel, chapter 10. In response to a question asked by an expert in Jewish law, Jesus tells the now very familiar story of a man traveling who is attacked by robbers, beaten, and left for dead.
 - a) There is no doubt of this man’s great need.
 - b) As you may remember, 2 different religious Jews passing by at 2 different times, observe the plight of the victim in need and yet avoid any contact and continue on their way.
 - c) Finally, it was the most unlikely person of all, a Samaritan who intervenes and is commended by Jesus for demonstrating true mercy.
- 3) In this story, Jesus wanted us to see that:
 - a) The Samaritan saw the man in need and had compassion. (v33)
 - b) He sprung into action as he went to victim and took care of his needs by attending to his wounds and bringing him to a safe inn. (v34)
 - c) He counted the cost and paid it by guaranteeing expenses incurred. (v35)
 - d) He went beyond the convenient + showed a commitment to the man’s complete healing when he assured the innkeeper that he would pay more if recovery took longer. (v35b)
- 4) In telling this story to a Jewish legal expert, he challenged him “*Now go + do the same*”-v37
- 5) For us, Jesus says don’t just identify with a Good Samaritan’s act of mercy, but imitate it!
- 6) So... how can we “*go and do the same?*” How can we, the people of God, live “Everyday Sent in mercy”?



- 7) Well... I like what *Redeemer Presbyterian Church* has developed.
- 8) Their “Mercy Journey Map” is their attempt to identify transformative attitudes + actions that we might strive for; wherever God has placed us; for whomever we encounter.
- 9) We are all free to take this journey.
- 10) This is how it progresses:
 - a) First, In our hearts, we should reflect and transform through formative experiences and biblical ideas that shape our understanding of mercy. (Think 1,000,000 minutes WITH God).
 - b) Then, In our homes, we should examine and act as mercy manifests in our daily lives and close relationships. (What better place to start demonstrating compassion to others?)
 - c) Of course, In our church, we should teach and embody mercy as new people of faith. (Adopted into God’s family, we should live as a new community filled with compassion for each other).
 - d) But we should not stop there for, In our community, we should catalyze and offer deeds of mercy, compassion, and justice to the world around us. (That is the “Multiplication Middle” – taking Jesus’ compassion to others as “ones SENT”).

Main Body – Application – Mercy at RHC - Intersection (2.5 min of 17.0 Minutes):

- 1) And for our few remaining minutes, I'd like to focus in on this last point.



- 2) As you can see by the graphic behind me, there are many ways that we can go out and DO mercy – as individuals, within groups, and as the corporate Body of Christ known as Redemption Hill Church.
- 3) Recently, our Elders, Staff, and Leaders have been wrestling with the question of how will we focus our attention corporately? Through our past experiences, talking with members of our community, paying attention to what “pain points” exist, and much intercessory prayer, we have identified and clarified a hierarchy of need that will allow us to prioritize well, focus our attention, and create opportunities to align and integrate well with others.
- 4) In order to fully commit RHC to bringing mercy, love and kindness to our community as a church, we have:
 - a) Looked: Praying that we would see the hurting and the broken in the same way the Samaritan saw the man on the side of the road. All the while, asking the Holy Spirit to open our eyes to opportunities to be instruments of mercy together.
- 5) We do this so we can not only have compassion but do compassion as we seek to:
 - a) Invest: Allocating our resources (time, talent, treasure) as a church and create margin to care for those in need. The Elders challenge us as a church to prioritize generosity toward others as a way to honor God and to be living expressions of his mercy. And, not just allocate but also...
 - b) Act!: Stopping what we're “doing” and caring for those who need care, not just see people in need of mercy and grant them verbal acknowledgement.
- 6) Let me share with you what we've concluded represents the “sweet spot” of intersection where our efforts as individuals or within our natural groups can combine with our overall energy as a gathered Family so we can be most effective with our time, talents, and treasure.

Main Body – Application – Mercy at RHC – Level 1 (10.5 min of 17.0 Minutes):

- 1) As Elders, it seemed wise to us to identify three levels of alignment based upon several factors:
 - a) Consistent with our long-standing approach to “SERVE Medford” local priorities were emphasized. We are “*in the city, for the city*”.
 - b) We asked ourselves, “What does our community self-identify as a “perceived need”?” Where do community leaders say that they need help? Who appears to be in “great need”? And, where are there gaps in assistance?
 - c) As an RHC emphasis, what has the greatest potential for congregational mobilization? Where can we all find an opportunity to contribute? What are we “good at”?
 - d) And, what appears “ripe” for strategic partnership – with both Christian and non-Christian allies?
- 2) As a result, what we call “**Level 1**” priorities emerged.
 - a) These priorities form our greatest focal points for local, and sometimes regional, impact.
 - b) We believe that they offer opportunities for broad participation by all congregants at RHC – sometimes together at once; sometimes in smaller groups; and sometimes as individuals.
 - c) Each has high potential for personal engagement and an opportunity for each of us to “DO” compassion “hands-on”.
 - d) We believe that each has the potential to address overlooked or vulnerable populations of people where our efforts can address areas of systemic inequity.

- e) These priorities will not only receive our attention on our Church Calendar and our labor throughout the year but also our collective finances – either through our church’s budgeting process or through special appeals.
- 3) The first area of Level 1 focus is.... addressing issues of “Food Insecurity” or “Hunger”.
- a) This should not feel surprising to you, especially given this morning’s Scripture, “*You give them something to eat*” is what Jesus said to His Disciples!
 - b) Since our beginning, RHC has had a commitment to seeing that folks who are hungry receive food. It is a basic necessity, right?
 - c) And, during my time serving on Medford’s “Food Insecurity Task Force”, I have learned first hand that pockets of hunger in our community clearly exist. [Pause]
 - d) We are so proud that each year, our congregation works to personally distribute full meals for the RHC Turkey Giveaway through the Medford Housing Authority to low-income families asking for help. Last November, nearly 150 families were blessed.
 - e) On many Super Bowl Sundays, we have rallied to collect canned Soup for distribution. What a blessing to see children arriving to church with a can in each hand.
 - f) You have helped to renovate “The Hope Chest”, a food pantry for students right here at MHS.
 - g) When the pandemic hit, many of you rallied to volunteer at the new established “Mystic Community Market” food pantry on Mystic Avenue here in Medford. What a blessing to see you assembling bags of groceries or handing them out to families – literally in lines of cars going around the block there.
 - h) But... we have only just begun. For the need is great and our potential to impact “Food Insecurity” is great.
- 4) The second area of “Level 1” focus is... addressing Foster Care.
- 5) Did you know that May is “National Foster Care Awareness Month”?
- 6) Let me share with you what I learned from a Christian organization addressing Foster Care (Bethany Christian Services):
- a) There are about 425,000 youth currently living in the U.S. foster care system.
 - b) Many have experienced painful trauma such as abuse, neglect, food scarcity or homelessness.
 - c) Too often these children are pushed to the margins and forgotten or, even worse, reduced to a statistical category.
 - d) In reality, however, each one is a uniquely valuable person with an inherent dignity that is worthy of care.
 - e) Each one is a real kid in real crisis who needs real love.
 - f) Specifically, each child needs a safe, supported foster family willing to provide loving care until reunification with their birth family can occur.
 - g) Since reunification is not always possible, many children need someone willing to permanently adopt them into their family.
 - h) When reunification or adoption does not happen, youth “age out” of the system at the age of 18 or 21 with little to no relational support system in their lives.
- 7) Let me be more specific to Massachusetts based on the last published report from the Department of Children & Families for the year 2019.
- a) During that year, 80% of the children being managed by DCF remained at their home under family stabilization plans.
 - b) However, when necessary, 10,328 children were placed in out-of-home care (either foster care or group homes) to safeguard their safety and well-being.
 - c) 80% of those placements were children, ages birth to 17 years old; 20% were young adults (18 & up).
 - d) Recognizing that children experience greater emotional and placement stability when safely placed with relatives, or kin, DCF has prioritized kin placement. Accordingly, 56% of children placed in a DCF foster home were placed with kin. But that still left a lot of children needing someone to open their home and give them a safe place to thrive.
- 8) There are a number of ways that we can help.

- a) The most obvious choice is you could choose to open your home to Foster Care.
 - i) I'm so proud that some of our homes have chosen to become Foster Care homes
 - (1) Teresa and I; Jon and Leigh; Andy & Cory Valk; ?Matt & Heather Brown
 - (2) Singles – Mary Kate Defranca; Ellen Schumacher
 - ii) Next Step:
 - (1) Talk to any of them
 - (2) Investigate MAPP Training for Foster Care certification
- b) You could choose to support Foster Care Families who are serving sacrificially.
 - i) Pay attention in your Community Groups... who is doing Foster Care? How can you serve them well?
 - ii) More formal? SupportOne Team Member – in place at RHC; we need more...
- c) You could choose to support Foster Care children:
 - i) Emergency Placement Backpacks (through The Foster Box)
 - (1) Clothing
 - (2) Diapers
 - (3) Gift cards
 - ii) Spend time:
 - (1) As you support our Foster Care families
 - (2) Future – tailor special events to bless children in foster care – bring celebration and joy to them.
- d) You could choose to support Birth Families:
 - i) Let's not forget that for most of the Foster Care placements, family reunification is the goal.
 - ii) These are parents under stress and we want to come alongside them, encouragement them, and disciple them – when possible.
 - iii) My prayer is that when a parent who has a child in Foster Care encounters RHC that they see our church as a place of hope and redemption, not an adversary full of judgment and rejection.
- e) You could choose to support Massachusetts Department of Children & Families
 - i) There is no doubt that the resources necessary to really accomplish their agency's mission are in short supply.
 - ii) We are investigating creative ways that we can encourage and support the workers laboring to strengthen families:
 - (1) RHCC site for supervised visits
 - (2) MAPP training
 - (3) Asking them "what do you need from us"?
- f) You could choose to support local Christian Foster Care organizations:
 - i) The Foster Box – www.thefosterbox.com; Fostering Hope – www.fosteringhope.org
 - ii) Provide Financial Gifts & Supplies
 - iii) Volunteers for Deliveries - Emergency placement
- g) As we continue to organize around these many opportunities, I encourage you to consider what you can do to not only think about Foster Care but to act on Foster Care.
- 9) The third area of "Level 1" focus is... speaking to the crisis need for "Addiction Recovery".
 - a) Drug and alcohol addiction is strangling Eastern Massachusetts.
 - b) I will spare you the recitation of a long list of statistics illustrating that truth. Why?
 - c) Because I am confident that there is no one within the sound of my voice is not personally impacted by its effects. Whether you have or are struggling with an addiction or you have someone you love dearly who is, we have all experienced the oppression that this crisis brings.
 - d) And, while there are a range of treatment options listed on a local google search, they are not enough... and, in the midst of this crisis... in our locale... there is a shortage of Christian voices speaking up and giving hope.
 - e) Let me be frank here... As Elders, we do not know today exactly how we will respond as a congregation but... we see the problem and we are sounding the call....

- f) Over the next few months and years, we hope to rally RHC to do something powerful and compassionate... It will require a lot from us... Let's not kid ourselves, it is a tough area of ministry... and, sometimes it feels like all we have is 5 loaves and 2 fishes but...
 - g) We will offer the Lord our 5 loaves and 2 fishes and trust Him to multiply it so that "all can eat and be satisfied"! [Pause]
 - h) Stay tuned for more information as we begin to identify next steps in the coming year.
- 10) Of course, as important as we feel these three areas are to address, RHC will have other areas of concern that some of you may be inclined to support with your attention.
- 11) Level 2 efforts would be supported within RHC but would likely have fewer opportunities for most congregants to exercise personal direct engagement.
- a) We will certainly make you aware of opportunities periodically.
 - b) We may connect some of you with some of the organizations that offer "specialized" skills in addressing some real "needs".
 - c) At times, we will make you aware of opportunities to be generous financially.
 - d) Examples may be:
 - i) Addressing "Human Sex Trafficking" through Amirah or...
 - ii) Supporting "Mental Health & Counseling" through Boston Center for Biblical Counseling or...
 - iii) Speaking for "The Unborn & Supporting Vulnerable Mothers" through the Boston Center for Pregnancy Choices or...
 - iv) Elevating "Orphan Care & Adoption" through Lifesong and the RHC Adoption Fund
 - e) These efforts and others like them will have periodic awareness and encouragement at RHC – just not all the time and not with "all hands on deck".
- 12) Finally, as Elders, we get bombarded with requests to address a wide range of "needs". Many are noble. Many are brought to our attention by you. While we can only respond and address to some identified "needs" as a church, we do want to create pathways of awareness and opportunity for personally motivated individuals to respond. We call these initiatives "Level 3". When we encounter these types of opportunities for mercy, here's what you can expect.
- a) We will offer occasional courtesy alerts so you can be aware.
 - b) We will provide information, referrals, and a defined pathway on how you – as an individual, family, or group - could personally respond.
 - c) Many times, we will be already aligned within our denomination or other like-minded organizations.
 - d) We will routinely share these connections through our Website, or NEXT, or Covenant Class; sometimes, when the time is right, we'll share when we preach, or when something difficult is occurring, or in sync with our culture at large.
 - e) Opportunities like these can run the range from Disaster Relief to Housing Insecurity to Literacy to Refugee Care to emerging Emergencies; the possibilities are endless because in a broken world human "need" can appear endless.
 - f) In the end, while we recognize that trying to focus as a church is important to our effectiveness as a church, we still desire to help you – as individuals – find healthy outlets for your individual compassions and we will do our best to help make those connections.
- 13) In the end, whether we all focus to impact Level 1 mercy opportunities or... whether we are able to elevate a Level 2 compassion organization... or whether we are able to connect individuals to Level 3 organizations, it is our desire as Elders to lead us well as we act as the Body of Christ committed to merciful action.

CONCLUSION (3.0 minutes):

- 1) For by now, I hope that we can all agree that God has a massive heart of compassion for those that are hurting – emotionally, socially, economically, physically, and spiritually...
 - a) From Jesus' deeds of mercy in feeding many hungry on a hillside to...

- b) His acts of mercy in rescuing His terrified disciples on an overwhelmed boat to...
 - c) His consistent willingness to heal the sick...
 - d) We can see compassion in action – not just restrained to awareness and sympathy but - moving out in direct and merciful acts.
- 2) And, I hope that we, as a result of personally experiencing His mercy and seeing His example in today’s Scriptures, take what we know by being WITH Him and accept our privilege of being SENT to others who need compassion also. After all, that is one of great privileges as a follower of Jesus – to live in the “Multiplication Middle”...
- 3) But... I have my concerns... Author Eugene Cho got me thinking when he wrote:
- a) *“We live in a world and culture in which—both out of privilege and conviction—many people want to make an impact. This is good. In fact, this is really good. This desire needs to be affirmed, nurtured, and cultivated. However, let’s be honest with ourselves. We all love justice and compassion. Seriously, who doesn’t? But is it possible we are more in love with the idea of compassion and justice than we are with actually putting it into practice? Is it possible that we all love compassion and justice ... until there’s a personal cost to living compassionately, loving mercy, and seeking justice?”*
 - i) (Eugene Cho, Overrated, 16–17)
- 4) I suspect that in our “Mercy Journey” we can become convinced in our hearts of the value of compassion... I’m guessing that in our homes we are probably going to have moments of kindness and service to those we love... I’m even confident that as a growing community of faith, we are learning to care for each other here at Redemption Hill Church... but... will we actually experience Jesus’ discipleship challenge to have His heart and become His hands of mercy to a world that is really hurting? [Pause]
- 5) This afternoon, you are going to get an email from me. That email is going to give you the opportunity to consider some really practical next steps that you can consider as together – we, the Body of Christ known as Redemption Hill Church – try to address the very big needs of our community – Food Insecurity, Foster Care, & Addiction Recovery. Please, please, please respond. It will probably only take you 5 minutes. You’ll just be identifying some areas of interest so we can help you consider ways that you can uniquely join RHC’s attempt to make a difference in our community – in the name of... and to the glory of the name of Jesus. Would you do that? Let’s not just listen to some Scripture and then go home... 😊
- 6) Let us pray...

INVITATION TO RESPOND & PRAYER (1.5 minutes):

- 1) Heavenly Father...
- 2) Even as we opened our gathering this morning reflecting on Psalm 103, we are reminded that:
 - a) It is you who “heals all (our) diseases... (vs 3)
 - b) It is you who “crowns (us) with steadfast love and mercy... (vs 4)
 - c) It is you who “satisfies (us) with good... (vs 5)
 - d) You, O Lord, “are merciful... and gracious”... (vs 8)
 - e) You, O Lord, “show compassion to those who fear (you)... (vs 13)
- 3) And so, we Bless you, Lord...
 - a) all of your works...
 - b) in all the places of your dominion...
- 4) Even as we humbly ask that you change our hearts to be more merciful like you and...
- 5) Change our eyes that we can see others like you and...
- 6) Change our actions so your dominion experienced by those who need your compassion...
- 7) We humbly ask this in the precious name of Jesus –
 - a) the One who feeds the hungry...
 - b) the One who rescues the terrified...
 - c) the One who heals the sick...
 - d) Amen and Amen...