

# Assignment: Mercy

June 14, 2026

Exodus 19:2-8a  
Matthew 9:35-10:8

Jesus' travels through Galilee disturbed him. D. Mark Davis, writing at [LeftBehindAndLovingIt](#), translates verse 36 as, "Yet having seen the crowd he was wrenched with compassion about them that they were having been harassed and tossed aside like sheep not having a shepherd." Then he writes: "This verse is chock full of strong language. Jesus' reaction is not just a sweet feeling of kindness, as if he just saw a flock of cute baby lambs. It is a visceral reaction, as the definition of *σπλαγχνίζομαι* suggests. I think it reads best as a gut reaction, something like 'furious compassion.'"

"Furious compassion." You've had that feeling, haven't you? That's the feeling when you see that somebody has been misled or abused and you're not only concerned for them you're angry on their behalf.

People feeling furious compassion tend to tell others about the feeling. They tend to gather people to witness and understand what's happening. They tend to organize them to do something about it.

That's what Jesus did. From a larger group of followers, he selected twelve to take on roles not just as learners, but as leaders. He selected twelve to take on the same work that he had been doing. It was no small commission. "As you go, proclaim the good news, 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.' Cure the sick; raise the dead; cleanse those with a skin disease; cast out demons. You received without payment; give without payment."

Every bit of that charge is laden with challenge. The easiest part seems to be first part: proclaim good news. Good news. Who could object to people proclaiming good news?

Well, the first people who object to good news are usually the people who are benefiting from the bad news. They're the ones setting the rules that protect their wealth and power from the ones without wealth and power. They're the ones who accused Jesus of healing people's demons with the power of demons. They're the ones who eventually got him executed as a rebel – since when you tell people the good news that God is in charge, not the people who say they're in charge, it is a rebellious act.

Jesus wasn't done. "Cure the sick" – I'm afraid that's not one of my skills. "Raise the dead" – I can't do that. "Cleanse those with a skin disease" – I can put a bandage on it. "Cast out

demons” – maybe I can; I’ve never tried. “You received without payment; give without payment” – how ironic is it that tomorrow is payday?

Matthew only gave us Jesus’ side of the assignment here, but my goodness. The disciples must have been saying something along the lines of, “Who me? No way.”

If they said it aloud (Matthew didn’t tell us), I’m pretty sure Jesus said something like, “Yeah, way.”

Christian discipleship – the Way of Jesus – is Assignment: Mercy.

As Debie Thomas writes at JourneyWithJesus.net, “Go and proclaim the good news of the kingdom. Go and cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, and cast out demons. Go and touch. Go and heal. Go and resurrect. Go and make peace. Go and render believable the compassion of God.”

Assignment: Mercy.

As our myna hopefully learned this morning, mercy doesn’t have to be grand and glowing. Mercy begins with basic consideration. Mercy welcomes others to join in the feast. Mercy steps in to decrease the temperature of a dispute. Mercy. Is attentive to everyone’s safety.

During this weekend’s ‘Aha Pae’aina, called together with the theme of building bridges, there were more than a few exhibits of basic mercy. We greeted one another warmly, with hugs and smiles and aloha spoken and unspoken. We feasted together – my, how we feasted. I’m not sure when I’ll have room to eat anything else again. There were items of disagreement on the agenda, and we addressed them with respect and consideration for the people on either side of the question. And if I can summon up a personal example, while delivering my workshop I froze my feet in their places for a minute or two, because a nine-month old baby was crawling around next to me and I was not going to step on her fingers.

Mercy is also bigger than that. I kept my feet still to avoid hurting a baby. Why can’t the nations of the earth keep our militaries still lest they harm the infants of another nation? Why are we told that it is a virtue to use force ruthlessly and mercilessly? Why are we told that we don’t have the courage to take territory from another nation, instead of being told that our sense of morality prevents us from taking territory from another nation?

Jesus had the opportunity to start a war. When he was arrested, somebody swung a sword. Jesus could have screamed, “Attack!” Instead, Jesus said, “Enough of this,” and healed the injured man.

Assignment: Mercy.

During this 'Aha, Conference Minister the Rev. Dr. David Popham told me something I hadn't known – he knows plenty of things that I don't, of course. He mentioned that Hawai'i has been closely followed by the disaster response people in the UCC and the Disciples of Christ. We've been through a lot, for sure: the 2018 Puna eruption here, the fires on Maui in 2023, this year's series of Kona low storms. He joked, in fact, that sometimes they would call him and tell him things that he didn't know, which was probably because the local people who would call the Conference were still busy dealing with the situation in front of them, while those whose professions it is to assess disasters were communicating with our national church staff.

The point is that we have friends. We have neighbors who meet the definition Jesus provided to "Who is my neighbor?" Do you remember? "Who is my neighbor" was the question that launched the story of the Good Samaritan – and the neighbor was the one who showed mercy.

Assignment: Mercy.

All right. Have I made that point enough? How are you going to fulfill your assignment?

You do it with everything you've got. Yes, that's a big ask. Yes, it's a lot to give. And in some instances, yes, it's not going to be enough.

Assignment: Mercy is a call to stay attentive to the small mercies, to the politenesses, the sharings, the protections. None of us can possibly be aware of everything going on around us, but if we can we can look right and left before crossing the street, we can look right and left to see what's going on with our neighbors. It's a call to ask about needs and not assume them. A person in a wheelchair may appreciate some assistance from you on a streetcorner, but they also may not. Be vigilant, and let your vigilance include the simple politeness of asking, "How are you doing?" followed, perhaps, by, "What do you need?"

Assignment: Mercy is a call to stay attentive to the big mercies, to the relief from systemic oppression and suffering, from the prejudices of social pressure and the discrimination of unjust law. Assignment: Mercy is a call to remind the world that war simply isn't the Way of Jesus, no matter what awful things the Church has said to the contrary in the past. Assignment: Mercy insists that people be held accountable for the harms they bring to others, that they be held accountable through an open and transparent process of law, and that those in power shall have no special influence in the adjudication of the crimes of which they're accused. Assignment: Mercy further calls us to bring people into society as well as we can, to make sure that neither habit nor desperation are major forces to drive people to criminal behavior.

Assignment: Mercy is a call to show that a loving God has had a powerful and positive influence on our lives. It is a call to testify to the grace that God has demonstrated in the world: in Creation, in guidance, in wisdom, in the poetry of the Psalms, in the restoration of distressed people, in the birth, life, teaching, death, and resurrection of Jesus, in the activity of the Holy Spirit from the first century to the twenty-first.

At this point, I am sorely tempted to parody the opening of an episode of Mission: Impossible. Your mission, if you choose to accept it, is to show God's mercy to a hurting world. If you are caught or captured in this mission, God will not disavow, but will celebrate your actions.

Actually, you want to be caught at this. Let everybody see. Let everybody know. You have accepted: Assignment: Mercy.

Amen.

*by Eric Anderson*