

A Sermon on Mercy

Sermon by Rev. Minister Angela Smith of COPE for July 26th, 2020 (and beyond)

Oxford Languages via Google.com defines "mercy" as "compassion or forgiveness shown toward someone whom it is within one's power to punish or harm." It is interesting that the word "power" is used rather than "authority" to indicate someone is capable of punishing or harming others unmercifully and unlawfully, but, not without risking penalties at law where under the color of law one might have the recognized authority to punish, but, not harm unjustifiably without also risking penalties at law.

The majority seem to feel even those who unjustly punish or harm others for any vicious purpose rather than out of actual objective necessity (i.e. self-defense, survival) still ought to be treated humanely and with compassion so we lead by example in hopes to inspire true and virtuous conduct from those who don't seem to understand why that matters yet on a personal level or even professionally. Others feel that rationalizing responding in kind is the more appropriate teaching style because they feel everyone reasonably has been exposed to honest and virtuous influences though are not learning from the existing parties practicing truth and virtue for some reason. So, they reason like this: If the United States of America is a majority Christian nation (70.6% source: <https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/>) it may be more likely than not that an individual is Christian and certainly has interacted with Christians so is familiar with practicing truth and virtue. And, if a Christian or influenced by Christians in society, one understands the Golden Rule (often taught as a "secular" golden rule in public schools as well) which is to do unto others as you'd have others do to you. So, if you would punish or harm others, whether you find it subjectively justifiable or not without due process, then you are implying in a majority Christian jurisdiction that you wish to be punished and harmed by doing that to others and the government will provide when that request is implied in many cases.

I'm a generous and charitable person as is this church. I've welcomed people who might otherwise be homeless into my home at times. Usually there is no problem and people just appreciate the help, adjust, and jump back into independent living after some respite. I recognize the honesty and virtue of the majority I've assisted. But, one said they were getting a job and only worked one day and then pretended to be working for weeks, though just not around during the time they said they were at work. I noticed collectibles, family heirlooms, and other things went missing. I asked about that and was told they hadn't been working like they said and had no idea what happened to the missing items. I was willing to give them money to travel to another support provider and ended up doing that. In addition, I covered their expenses and asked if they wanted anything from the store or special to eat or anything that I could provide to make them more comfortable. So, there was absolutely no reason for my items to go missing.

I've had time to meditate on that and believe that person was suffering most from false pride or vanity as far as vices go. I believe they were too full of vanity and false pride to ask for what they want or need and chose to steal to give themselves the illusion of independence rather than accept the assistance available as offered. I might have been

able to prove beyond a reasonable doubt who stole the items, but, showed compassion because sometimes false pride/vanity is difficult to overcome especially when blind to one's own vices and assuming right to other people's property through any number of rationalizations (i.e. "She never wears this bracelet given to her by her Great Grandmother on her death bed, I'm sure she won't miss it") and it is that assumption of right that is the crime and suggests one feels as if an authority to confiscate and re-purpose someone else's property in a country where all are recognized as created equal in the eyes of the law. Also, as a Wycliffite, I believe all people are equal in the eyes of God as well. So, if blind or even willfully blind to man's law and God's law, seems the laws of nature are all that is left to which one might be holding themselves to and that is often a "might makes right" scenario. Did you know that hummingbirds steal spider silk from spider webs to sew up their nests? Hummingbirds steal both the trapped insects in the web and eat them and the silk to build their nests. Source: <https://backyardwildlifeconnection.com/2018/05/26/the-hummingbird-spider-connection/> So, like a spider, I might be annoyed that I built a home, stocked my pantry, and a hummingbird just comes by destroying my home by taking silk and running off with my food. But, also recognize that I'm still alive and birds eat spiders. Source: <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/what-animals-eat-spiders.html> And, it doesn't make me feel safe or really like welcoming "birds", particularly "jailbirds" who've eaten other "spiders" or harmed them in some way. I still love birds though and wouldn't deny them the right to life while arguably hoping the spiders just rebuild and are capable of continuing to stock up on food for themselves which maybe if particularly generous they just share or generously acknowledge they are giving gifts to the birds whether the birds show appreciation for the charity or not where forgiveness and/or mercy are shown.

What if the little spider could call in reinforcements from a goliath bird-eating tarantula that could eat the hummingbird? Source: <https://nationalzoo.si.edu/animals/goliath-bird-eating-tarantula> And, some tarantulas are cannibals, even eating their mates. Source: <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2014/04/140422084730.htm> Tarantulas even eat other spiders not identified as tarantulas. Source: <https://animals.mom.me/tarantulas-eat-1878.html> So, if a spider sought to protect his/her web from theft by hummingbirds, the spider might call in a goliath bird-eating tarantula and assume the risks while potentially losing everything when the tarantula demands some form of compensation for the assist unless the goliath bird-eating tarantula is particularly virtuous and helping out the other spider while maybe feeling being notified where to catch a bird for dinner that is bothering a little homemaking spider friend is reward enough and mutually beneficial. But, more likely than not that little spider sees a few slight repairs to the web, given spiders can make more silk and catch more food for the web/pantry, as a reasonable response rather than calling in a bird-eating tarantula to eat the hummingbird/thief. So, you can see that spider as being forgiving, generous, and diligent or victimized, requiring charitable assistance, and still diligent because the repairs need to and will be made either way. However, if the little spider that was victim of the hummingbird's theft just gave up and sent out a distress call, it could result in a predator showing up to eat them rather than a hero actually virtuous enough to offer an assist or any kind of chance at justice. The alternative of course is that the spider chooses to relocate in hopes of finding a more secure and equally flourishing with insects spot that birds who eat insects don't know

about yet. The spiders travel light and are equipped to set up house and trap food wherever they go. Quite efficient as far as species go in terms of preparedness.

But, humans are all the same species so the difference between say a bird stealing from a spider is the same or arguably the same as when my dog dares to take food off the counter, table, or even out of my hand even as a joke which they put their tails down and leave ashamed or are wrestled for even if it is thrown away because they shouldn't be rewarded for that and they know it. I wrestled my Toy Poodle (actual breed living dog and that was the size) when I was a child who took half a grilled cheese sandwich out of my hand. He fought me for it, but, I won and threw it away. So, when in a more natural law frame of mind, I'd rather arguably set fire to the oil reserves in Iraq than let anyone else have them who was assuming right to it not recognized by the jurisdiction as a matter of law. But, I didn't punish or harm my poodle. I just didn't let him keep the ill-gotten gains which he may have felt was punishment enough and total bullshit because now I threw it away so no one gets it, how is waste better? And, if he could speak English and made that argument, I would've felt a little guilty at throwing it away but may have given it to Cindy, the other Toy Poodle, instead of wasting it as my response. But, I was a child so I was focused more on making sure Killer (the thief poodle) didn't gain from his misconduct and not on preventing or reducing food waste purely objectively.

So, you can see the influence a bit on my actions of the whole argument that a desire for punishment/correction/harm is implied when one unjustly punishes and/or harms under assumed authority not recognized at law as far as how Killer was disciplined. He didn't physically grab me or bite me, he grabbed the half sandwich and I tackled him, wrestled him for it, and got it back from him then threw it away. But, he never did that again. I'd say he wasn't harmed by it because no broken bones nor injuries requiring medical attention. He was fine, barking at the postman and playing fetch almost immediately after. But, had that been on video and you just saw me tackle him and take the sandwich, you might think I'm aggressive or abusive or used excessive force. The Toy Poodle today (Killer was an AKC registered breeder or approved for breeding) for breeding can cost up to \$4,000 per puppy (source: <https://thehappypuppysite.com/how-much-are-poodles/>) and even at a restaurant 1/2 a grilled cheese sandwich today costs (\$4.99 but with sides at restaurants source: <https://www.menuwithprice.com/menu/grilled-cheese-and-co/>). So, purely objectively, the dog was worth more than the 1/2 of sandwich and arguably 1000 times more at law. But, it was my sandwich and PapaSam made it for me, not Killer. I also usually shared when I was finished and still rarely finish what I eat and share what I don't with my dog(s) when appropriate. PapaSam was proud of how I handled it because he said Killer should know better. But, objectively legally PapaSam owned Killer and had I killed Killer in the quest to retrieve the stolen sandwich, PapaSam could arguably have sued my Mom (legally liable for my actions when a minor or any damage to any property) for the value of Killer, including any earning potential breeding him might generate for PapaSam. But, my Mom entrusted my care to PapaSam who was watching me at the time and thereby ultimately responsible legally in that moment to supervise me and Killer. He was a pet, qualified to breed, but, not employed in that manner though gifted Cindy arguably and they did have puppies after which both were spayed/neutered.

The point is, whether you take all the facts into objective consideration or not, US courts will in most jurisdictions. So, you can see forgiveness and/or compassion as merciful where applied in some cases and in other cases, like the release of former Judge Michael Conahan, due to his age and the COVID risks though he took kickbacks and unjustly institutionalized many youth in a private institution so he could rake in millions while they were exploited, harmed, and/or died, think maybe that's too merciful in full context. That case is known as the "Kids for Cash" case. Source: <https://www.inquirer.com/news/pennsylvania/kids-for-cs-michael-conahan-20200623.html> And, if you turn to vigilantism you too risk being penalized at law so may benefit from meditating on virtue where focusing on truth just pisses you off to the extent you feel justice isn't being served so vengeance/wrath feels tempting. Fortunately, some express their temptations to vice through fiction and art while practicing truth and virtue in daily life. And, if you want to call in a goliath bird-eating tarantula or human equivalent to defend yourself or your property, pay well and always show the utmost respect for their equality to you in the eyes of the law and God to avoid their feeling exploited or oppressed and deciding to defend themselves and any other victims of your viciousness with their skill set where they don't just become derelict in their contracted duties and let harm come to you or your property.

So, being humble enough to admit error or potential for error by having an appeals process and recognizing others humble enough to admit error or potential for error too is often where we find compassion and mercy or humanize each other. And, where we assume authority we do not have and/or fail to recognize our own frailty or fallibility, people wonder what other virtues may be lacking since honesty is missing so whether an individual is developmentally disabled or willfully blind becomes a test and one not yet perfected in any setting that really wants to know so we don't have to have the death penalty. Now, PETA says if a nonhuman animal is too disabled or vicious, euthanasia is the most merciful while recommending sterilization of any survivors. Our justice system has to believe a first time offense was a one time error in judgment that the perpetrator regrets, understands, and takes full responsibility for at law or be convinced of innocence or beyond a reasonable doubt for prosecution and/or trial. But, if convicted, you can still be forced to provide labor depending on jurisdiction. PETA feels any involuntary labor (even if it helps with covering costs of caring for a nonhuman animal or their necessities) is worse than death and finds death more merciful. Would PETA suggest the spider that was victim of theft and forced by the theft by the hummingbird to rebuild reason the spider should opt for suicide or euthanasia? Maybe only if the goliath bird-eating tarantula was unwilling to provide protection or help the victimized spider recover, rebuild, and/or protect going forward. If the victimized spider couldn't avoid being exploited in some way by the hummingbird, PETA would suggest the spider be euthanized? We see the spiders don't choose suicide or euthanasia and simply repair their webs and go about their business. This to me suggests that PETA is misinformed as to what nonhuman species (or even human survivors of slavery or the holocaust) would actually choose if victimized or exploited. So, I'd say they are definitively not speaking for the animals as a matter of common sense, history, and science.

How much mercy was shown to the victims of crime? How much compassion? Does the perpetrator take responsibility and regret the harm caused to the victim? And, where one feels justice has been denied and sees the perpetrator getting away with it (say in the case of raping and murdering a 4 year old human child), do you see how one might assume the risks that come with vigilantism believing it is for the greater good because someone who would do that shouldn't be unsupervised ever if allowed to live? Well, inmate Jonathan Watson confessed to killing two child molesters behind bars and even warned if he was placed in cells with them he would become violent. So, a very honest man willing to take responsibility for his actions as well as ask for help even when it seemingly goes ignored. Source: <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2020/02/22/inmate-jonathan-watson-says-he-killed-2-molesters-california-prison/4842042002/> So, if one believes an illegal action is justified but not justifiable as a matter of man's laws, still showing respect and understanding (competence at law) of both if confessing and taking responsibility. And, I respect that and believe the law does too.

Changing lanes a bit to address what I see as unreasonable and at times unmerciful condemnation of Jeff Bezos. No more can Jeff Bezos demand you must work for him without compensation than can you coercively demand Jeff Bezos give you money generously and charitably under duress or threat of force as a matter of law. No one can force you to work and you can rely on charity to the extent charity is available and can provide necessities in times of need. But, you can't forcibly demand control of a home, company, town, city, state, or country that doesn't belong to you and your clique alone as a matter of law without the majority seeing you as a threat and possible terrorist.

Please treat Jeff Bezos as you'd like to be treated if you were Jeff Bezos. Put yourself in Jeff Bezos' shoes and learn about his life and how he built amazon.com starting it out of his garage. If you worked really hard and became really successful while donating billions to charity and setting up a whole way for all customers to donate to charity every time they shop too and people showed up at your home or office demanding you change the way you do business or demanding you give into their demands, how would you feel and how likely would you be to call in the human equivalent of the goliath bird-eating tarantula? In such a case, how likely would you be to be inspired to be charitable to those making demands at least by not calling in reinforcements as described above if not complying with the demands? Well, Jeff Bezos is compassionate and merciful and the evidence of that is abundant. He also accepts critical and complimentary feedback. You know who kills in the name of mercy? PETA. You know who blocks/shuns anyone offering critical feedback? PETA. You know who considers feedback but still makes their own decisions and thinks for themselves? Me and Jeff Bezos to name two.

So, Golden Rule still applies and some people treat it as a trick of some sort where if you are vicious it implies you want others to viciously respond to you (aka the rationalization "you asked for it by being vicious knowing I'm a Christian and would believe you are too and that that implies vicious is how you wish to be treated") and if not you prove to be a hypocrite which is not the revelation you want to make to a Christian or likely anyone of good faith you wish to show you any consideration or respect. So, practice truth and virtue and give Jeff Bezos a break. Everyone should really exercise due diligence when

donating to charities to avoid supporting scams/cults/frauds/etc. So, any delay in donating to any cause or charity may be a result of his exercising due diligence and actually being responsible with his resources. But, it is that his employees want better working conditions and better pay that results in most of the criticism of Bezos.

Let me argue for him on that point a bit. I've worked for various retailers throughout my life at different times. Often there's a warehouse or storage space for additional inventory whether at a shoe store, grocery store, or video store. If Bezos was to use the amount of air conditioning arguably required to keep all warehouse employees comfortable while working during summer time, it would speed up global warming. "In fact, some studies predict that by 2050, roughly 25 percent of global warming will be caused by air conditioning." Source: <https://mastersheatcool.com/2019/04/do-air-conditioners-cause-any-harm-to-the-environment> So, the labor organizers want better conditions and air-conditioning but the environmentalists say that would speed up climate change. Bezos addresses it by making sure in the event any employees have heat-related illnesses they get immediate and qualified medical attention or transport to the hospital. Now, you could argue the employees deserve a more comfortable work environment with less immediate risks to health or safety during hot summer temperatures or that everyone deserves corporations to be environmentally responsible and not dramatically expedite climate change according to some studies. I honestly believe he does his best and that amazon.com does their best while considering variables others may not consider at times. Have mercy and compassion for Jeff Bezos too.

There are opportunities to send messages, receive mystery bonus blessings, and more with or without donating available now on our new "Pass the Basket" page at <https://www.cope.church/basket.htm> . Thank You.

"And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." John 8:32 KJV Willful blindness is an abomination.

COPE accepts Feedback, critical and complimentary. Learn more at <https://www.cope.church/feedback.htm> . For the sake of keeping myself and others humble, a sense of humor is welcome on all sides.

For More About COPE and the HEAL Mission, see:

<https://www.cope.church> and <http://www.heal-online.org>