Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy:
Reading the Scriptures
through the Jubilee Year of Mercy

An exchange with

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Jesus and Mercy

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Jesus and the Gospels

* The Gospels are not biographies of Jesus
* The Gospels do preserve memories of the ministry of Jesus
* The Gospels are the earliest examples of narrative Christology
	+ Christology is a sustained reflection on the person and the mission of Jesus
	+ These Christologies are put in the form of a narrative

A literary preface

* Jesus knew the sacred literature of his own people
* In the Hebrew Scriptures,חֶ֫סֶד (*hesed*) both describes God, and describes what God requires of his people
* In Hebrew, חֶ֫סֶד(*hesed*) has a wide semantic range
	+ Loyalty
	+ Kindness
	+ Mercy

A linguistic Preface

* Jesus undoubtedly spoke in Aramaic
* It is likely that he knew Hebrew
* It is possible that he knew Greek
* The sayings of Jesus are preserved only in Greek
* חֶסֶד (*hesed*) was typically rendered in the Greek of the Septuagint by ελεος (*eleos*)
* The Gospels use various forms of ελεος to describe the mercy of God, or acts of mercy by Jesus

The sayings of Jesus on Mercy

* “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy” (Matthew 5:7)
* “I desire mercy and not sacrifice” (Matthew 9:13; 12:7)

Matthew 5:7

* The fifth of nine macarisms which open the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:1 – 7:29)
* Note the use of a (quasi-) divine passive
	+ A way of identifying divine activity without naming God
* Virtue as mimetic
	+ See Matthew 5:48
	+ See Leviticus 19:2

Matthew 9:13

* This is a pronouncement story
	+ A brief narrative, the purpose of which is to provide a context within which a memorable saying of Jesus can be remembered and interpreted
* The narrative preserves the memory of Jesus’ table fellowship with sinners
* The memorable saying is Matthew 9:12, 13B
	+ Compare to Mark 2:17
* Here Matthew interposes the quotation from Hosea 6:6

Matthew 12:1-8

* Another pronouncement story
* Here the narrative preserves the memory of Jesus’ attitude toward the Law
* Compare to Mark 2:23-28 and Luke 6:1-5
* Here again, Matthew interposes the reference to Hosea 6:6

Why the references to Hosea 6:6?

* Matthew’s Gospel was written for believers who were deeply immersed in the Hebrew Scriptures
* Like the fulfillment citations (see Mt. 1:22; 2:15B; 2:23B; 4:14-16, etc.), the references to Hosea 6:6 allow the original believers to understand Jesus within a set of authoritative categories
* In Mt 9:13 and 12:7, the point seems to be that acts of mercy are ways by which one can enter into communion with God

The merciful deeds of Jesus

* The merciful deeds of Jesus are frequently acts of thaumaturgy
* As such, they are manifestations of the power of God
* They are frequently occasioned by the request ἐλέησόν με (*eleēson me*) “Have mercy on me”

Acts of thaumaturgy
in the Gospels

* Someone is in extreme difficulty
* Jesus says something or does something which eliminates the difficulty
* There is a demonstration of the efficacy of the act of thaumaturgy
* The bystanders react as a kind of choric response

The healing of the Canaanite woman’s daughter
(Matthew 15:21-28)

* The woman is an outsider
* The disciples wish to send her away
* Literary pattern
	+ initial request
	+ initial rebuff
	+ repeated request
	+ eventual compliance
* The interchange between Jesus and the woman shows the sharp wits of both
* The healing takes place at a distance
* Mercy is available, even to outsiders

The Healing of Bar Timaeus
(Mark 10:46-52)

* Someone tries to impede access to Jesus
* Bar-Timaeus is persistent, repeating “Have mercy on me” twice (vv. 47B, 48B)
* The thaumaturgical act is brief here (vv. 51-52A)
* Note the unusual choric response (vv. 52B)
* The reception of mercy as the occasion for discipleship

Cleansing ten lepers
(Luke 17:11–19)

* Leprosy as a “feared disease”
* Jesus and lepers
* The other nine do as they’re told (v. 14)
* The Samaritan engages in “holy disobedience” (v. 15)
* What does this tell us about the Kingdom of God?

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