

Happy Are The Merciful
Sermon Notes
October 31, 2021
David A. Renwick
National Presbyterian Church, Washington, DC

THE ABUSE OF POWER & THE ABSENCE OF MERCY

Andy Crouch, “Playing God: Redeeming the Gift of Power.”
Inter-Varsity Press, 2014, pp.46-47

In Nietzsche’s vision all of us are on a quest for omnipotence – the ability to become master over all space. The only problem is other bodies, who get in our way; indeed, every other body is engaged in exactly the same quest as us!

For Nietzsche (according to Crouch) even the most seemingly sympathetic and moral of communities is -- just under the surface *a temporary and expedient set of alliances based on sufficient similarity to justify working together -- for the moment -- to defeat those other bodies who are also seeking to dominate all space and time.*

That is, any union, any coming together, any seeming community,
is just a holding pattern, a momentary alliance until the threat from the others can be quelled.

which means that as soon as

“one body (or group) sees the opportunity, it will dissolve all previous alliances and seize the opportunity to take over, even from its own closest relations . . . to be like gods extending their mastery further and further until eventually there will be nothing left but their own absolute supremacy.

THE USE OF POWER AND THE PRESENCE OF MERCY

Ethel Blackledge

Plus Magazine, July/Aug 1992

When I was a little girl in the 1930s my family moved to a house in Southwestern Ohio. At first the only source of water we had was a tank, a cistern, in which we caught rain water. Our next-door neighbors the Lawsons offered us water from their well when we needed it and my parents eventually saved enough money to have our own well dug. Soon after that a terrible drought hit the Midwest and wells began to dry up. Water could have been trucked in but the great depression had hit the nation and people had no money. They depended on nature. The lack of rain continued and soon the Lawsons’ well went dry. They asked if we could spare enough water for their use and mother replied without hesitation, ‘God gave us the water. God has been merciful to us. Take what you need.’

Then the Perkins, who lived across the street, came over and said their well too was dry. Mother gave them the same answer. As days went by with no rain, other neighbors came too all pumping water from our well. Mister Page, a neighbor whose well supplied water asked mother, ‘aren’t you scared letting all those people help themselves to your water? Your well will run dry.’ Again mother gave the same answer: ‘God gave us the water. We will share it.’ [DR: *in other words, if this is what God is like, this is what I want to be like too.*] A few days later Mrs. Gaines, a widow with five children who lived near the Pages, sent her young son up with an empty bucket: ‘Mama said you might be kind enough to spare some water from your well,’ he said shyly. ‘We used to get water from Mr. Page’s well, but he says we can’t have any more.’ Mother replied, ‘go to the well, fill your bucket, God is still giving us water.’

Day after day the hot sun burned down scorching fields around as creeks had long ago dried up the water disappearing. I remember the day when Mister Page with an empty bucket on his arm knocked at our door. ‘I know that I refused water to my neighbor’ he said, ‘and now our well has gone dry like the rest. If you could’ . . . and mother did not even let him finish the sentence. [DR: *She wasn’t going to use her power to push him down any more than he was already, though she had every reason to say he deserved all of it. She showed him mercy from the very start of her words.*] ‘If you could,’ . . . and mother did not even let him finish the sentence: ‘God gave us the water take what you need.’

As a result the Pages became the seventh family, many of them with small children who now carried water from our lone well. Throughout the dry hot days of that summer we furnished water to 50 people and our well never went dry.

After almost 60 years I still remember vividly how Mr. Page, having refused water to a widow with five children, came to our house with an empty bucket on his arm, begging for water, in need of mercy. Mother’s affirmative answer taught me that if we take care of one another . . . if we take care of one another God will take care of us.