



Old School Can Still be Cool
"1986 – Kyrie"

(Biblical Text: Psalm 51:1-17)

Dr. Michael F. Gardner, Senior Pastor
 Old Mission Church, Fairway, Kansas

(Traditional) I love that Dvořák setting of the Kyrie. It's an ancient Greek prayer, really a song of worship, which has been in continual use since at least the second century, if not before.¹ Talk about "old school." And the ancient words: "*Kýrie, eléison; Christé, eléison; Kýrie, eléison*" mean "Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy."

(Contemporary) There's an ancient Greek prayer, really a song of worship, that has been used since at least the second century - talk about "old school." The words: "*Kýrie, eléison; Christé, eléison; Kýrie, eléison*" mean "Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy."

And it's been a "*Lord, have mercy*" kind of week for sports fans like me!

The Chiefs Thursday against the Packers? Well, that was just painful. "*Lord, have mercy.*" Friday? KC Sporting vs. Houston? Ouch! "*Lord, have mercy.*" The Royals in the opener at Kauffman against Cleveland? I don't want to talk about it! What I said actually was - *you don't really need to know that!* It wasn't good. It would have been better just to say, "*Lord, have mercy.*"

(And K-State's victory over Stephen F. Austin yesterday didn't help much. The real test will be when they play Auburn this week, anyway.)

The *Kyrie* is the one piece of the Christian liturgy that is still in Greek. For some reason it never made it over to Latin like the rest of the mass did.

But if you were coming of age in the eighties, it's more likely that you'll know it from Mr. Mister's number one hit song in 1986, from their album, "*Broken Wings.*" (*Bill can, we play a clip?*) And I still know the lyrics:

"Kýrie, eléison, down the road that I must travel
Kýrie, eléison, through the darkness of the night."

According to Mr. Mister's Richard Page, who is still singing it, the song was, and still is, a prayer for help, when we need it.² And we do. In ways that are much deeper, down in the heart of us, than a ball game. **We need it.**

¹ From The Catholic Encyclopedia. New York: Robert Appleton Company: "Arrian quotes it in the second century: "Invoking God we say Kyrie Eleison" (*Diatribæ Epicteti*, II, 7)"

² [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kyrie_\(song\) - cite_note-Page-4](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kyrie_(song) - cite_note-Page-4)

King David did. That's where the 51st Psalm in our Bible lesson comes from.

*¹Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. ²Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. ³For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.*³

David, like all of us, knew his sins. Outside he's still a king. Inside, he carries his past, the mess he has created, his brokenness, like an unyielding burden.

You may not know the story... But, in David's day, if you didn't know, you must have been living under a rock. If CNN or Fox News had been there like today, we all would have known. It's ugly, R-rated, detail is in 2 Samuel 12.

David spies the beautiful Bathsheba. She's married. But David goes after her anyway, and she becomes pregnant. And if he hadn't sinned enough, he calls her soldier husband Uriah home from the front, trying to cover up their sin. When that doesn't work, he sends Uriah to the front lines, sure to be killed. That works. Uriah is killed. David thinks he's free. **But we never are.**

His best friend, Nathan, finally confronts David with a story about a despicable man who takes what isn't his. And Nathan's words cut to his heart, *"David, you are the man."* And we are. Sinful men and women.

David was filled with remorse and regret and self-loathing? How could he not be? I don't know how deeply David was punished for his sin - but I'm certain he was punished by his sin. We all are.

How many times did he replay his sins in his head wishing beyond hope that he could just go back and change it? Re-write his own past? Undo what was done? *Lord, have mercy.* Who among us can't relate to that feeling?

David's words in Psalm 51 are non-specific, that's why they still speak to us, to the specifics of our own personal failures. And we all have them. Maybe not David's kind of sin... But we all carry regrets, for things done or left undone, words said, or unsaid. Romans 3:23 is right. We all have sinned...

And inside, whether we are a strong Christian or not, we hope there is a way, some way, to unburden our soul from the weight of our own failures and sins. *Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy.*

Maybe the reason those ancient words still speak is that we are hoping to God that our sin is not the final word. We beg for God's mercy to be with us, because ours is not enough.

³ Psalm 51:1-3. *New Revised Standard Version*. Copyright © 1989. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

David surely understood this, if anyone ever did. And in Psalm 51, he pours out his heart. *Lord, have mercy.*

One of my favorite bloggers, Nadia Bolz Weber, says, it this way:

“The adjective so often coupled with mercy is the word tender, but this mercy was not tender, this mercy was a blunt instrument.”

True mercy, the God kind, doesn't wrap a warm blanket around us saying, “There, there, it's ok.” God's mercy is the kind that kills the thing in us that led us to wrong, and resurrects us into something new in its place.

In our guilt and remorse we wish for the ability to re-write our own past, but what's done cannot be undone. The words we have spoken cannot be unspoken. Broken wings cannot be unbroken. *But they can be healed.*

In the mercy of God, our past, our sins cannot be undone, but they **can** be redeemed. I cling to this truth. I want to. I have to. I need to.

After the blunt instrument of God's mercy was done with David, he would then become a truly great man for God. It also took that kind of mercy to take Paul from being a persecutor and a hater, to one who would write 2/3 of the New Testament. Or Zacchaeus from committing fraud to following Jesus, or Mary Magdalene from unrighteousness to unbelievable faithfulness. **God can redeem anything and anyone.**

And to say *“Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy, Lord, have mercy,”* is to lay our hope in the redeeming work of God in Christ as though our lives depended on it because they do. They do.

God redeems us from even the biggest messes we make. I've made some *doozies*. But the fractures and pain and hurt caused by my selfishness, or short fuse, or sharp wit, or sarcasm, or more failures than I can count, are never the final thing. **God's redemptive work is the final thing.**

So either God can redeem everything or God can redeem nothing - and I stand here before you believing the former and not the later because it is the truth. It was the truth for David, then, and it is the truth for us today.

So, all I can say, all I came to say, is this. *Kýrie, eléison. Lord, have mercy, Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy.* The good news is that he does.

God can redeem anything. Anything. Even me. Even you. Let's pray.