

## The Parable of the Barren Fig Tree (Luke 13 v1-9)

**13** At that time some people were there who told Jesus about the Galileans whom Pilate had killed while they were offering sacrifices to God. <sup>2</sup> Jesus answered them, "Because those Galileans were killed in that way, do you think it proves that they were worse sinners than all other Galileans? <sup>3</sup> No indeed! And I tell you that if you do not turn from your sins, you will all die as they did. <sup>4</sup> What about those eighteen people in Siloam who were killed when the tower fell on them? Do you suppose this proves that they were worse than all the other people living in Jerusalem? <sup>5</sup> No indeed! And I tell you that if you do not turn from your sins, you will all die as they did." <sup>6</sup> Then Jesus told them this parable: "There was once a man who had a fig tree growing in his vineyard. He went looking for figs on it but found none. <sup>7</sup> So he said to his gardener, 'Look, for three years I have been coming here looking for figs on this fig tree, and I haven't found any. Dig it out! Why should it go on using up the soil?' <sup>8</sup> But the gardener answered, 'Leave it alone, sir, just one more year; I will dig around it and put in some manure. <sup>9</sup> Then if the tree bears figs next year, so much the better; if not, then you can dig it out.'

Old Testament Reading: Micah 4 v1-4

*In days to come the mountain where the Temple stands will be the highest one of all, towering above all the hills. Many nations will come streaming to it, and their people will say, Let us go up the hill of the LORD to the Temple of Israel's God. He will teach us what he wants us to do; we will walk in the paths he has chosen. For the LORD's teaching comes from Jerusalem; from Zion he speaks to his people."* <sup>3</sup> He will settle disputes among the nations, among the great powers near and far. They will hammer their swords into plows and their spears into pruning knives. Nations will never again go to war, never prepare for battle again. <sup>4</sup> Everyone will live in peace among their own vineyards and fig trees, and no one will make them afraid. The LORD Almighty has promised this

<sup>13</sup> For God will not show mercy when he judges the person who has not been merciful; but mercy triumphs over judgment. (James 2v13)

### Justice or Mercy?

Here is a question for you. Do you want to see more Justice, judgement and discipline, more law and order, **or** do you want to see more mercy, and more leniency towards offenders? Justice or Mercy?  
Hands up – More Justice. Hands up – More Mercy.

Here is a situation. You live down-town, and one evening a gang of youths rampage down your street. Amongst the damage they do, you have spray paint on the front wall of your house, and a key scraped down your new car, and a brick has been thrown through your window which has also taken out and smashed your favourite vase which had been a wedding present. Picture the damage to your property. How do you feel about that? You hear 2 days later that each member of the gang, which included mainly young men, but also a couple of teenagers. They have been identified on CCTV. Do you want them punished or let off with a warning. What do you think?

The offenders have now all been visited by the police. Many properties were damaged that night and the cost of damage was so big overall that the case is being heard in the number 1 court of the Magistrates office, which means that there could be custodial sentences given out. They could go to prison. How do you feel about that. Justice or Mercy?

They you hear that one of the teenagers was actually a young relative of yours, who has been struggling for the last 9 months ever since his best friend unexpectedly committed suicide, and he had dropped off his studies and seemed to be finding it hard to find new friends. Not knowing it was yours, he had scraped the key down your new car. Justice or Mercy?

Let's take the same situation, but imagine now that you are living in a country which is occupied. The occupying forces have taken over a property next to yours, and use it as one of their administrative centres. The riot down your street was politically motivated. Your relative had been recruited into a resistance force against the occupiers. Does this make a difference? Does the cause, justify the vandalism to your property. If you complain, you will probably be seen as a sympathiser with the occupying force, and have deliberate attacks on you next rather than being collateral damage. Justice or Mercy? Can you feel the tension between the two. Bottle that feeling and we'll come back to it.

## Lost Gospel?

Today we are going to look at the twin voices of Justice and Mercy and ask what Jesus has to say on the matter, by studying an unfamiliar passage in Luke's Gospel.

When I was in my first year of University I had lodgings with a Christian man, who declared to me that he had at first enjoyed reading the Gospels, but had now moved on to Paul's letters which he was really in to. The inference was that the Gospels were alright to cut your teeth on, but if you want to really learn stuff and get into the real meat of things then Paul's letters is where it's at. These are letters which are written to specific people or churches in specific cultural contexts, and whilst there is much inspiration to be had from them when carefully interpreted and applied, they can never be regarded as a substitute for the Gospels, or a progression on from them.

The popular Scottish theologian and speaker John Bell, says that Paul only covers 3% of the Gospels in his letters. There is, nothing on the life of Jesus except his death, none of his sayings such as 'I am the way, the truth and the life', no mention of his incredible miracles (other than his resurrection), and no reference to any of his parables, not even the biggies like the Prodigal son. *[One reason, may be that he was unaware of much of it. Yes, he spent time with Peter and the other apostles, so may have learnt from them, but Paul did not have the Gospels before he wrote his letters. Why because they had not yet been compiled. In fact Luke wrote the story of Paul down in the book of Acts after all his missionary journeys, probably at the same time that he compiled his Gospel. Some believe that both books were written by Luke as part of the defence for Paul in court late in his life.]*

We have four gospels in our bibles, but many more were written, and I confess that I am fascinated by what are called the 'Lost Gospels' or 'Secret Gospels' and other books from the first and second century about Jesus and the early Church. These include gospels attributed to Philip, Thomas and Mary Magdalene. The church of course had its reasons, most probably justified, for rejecting these books. Yet within the four short books we do have Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, there are plenty of passages and parables which get overlooked. I think for those of us who have been a Christian some while, we think we know what's in the Gospels, and may have skim read them each several times, but probably have never paused long enough over some passages to understand them properly. So parts of our Gospel remain forever hidden to us, and we miss out on the teaching. If we put all the bits from the 4 gospels together that we don't look at regularly in Church, we could probably compile our own lost gospel from these texts.

I think this is one of those passages. When did you last study or hear a sermon on the tower of Siloam, or the parable of the Barren Fig tree. No – not the story of the fig tree that Jesus cursed. Ever? Probably not. If that's true, then let's pick up a gospel passage that has been hiding in plain sight, a nine verse chunk from the start of the 13<sup>th</sup> chapter of Luke. The first five verses talk about a challenge some visitors make to Jesus and his response, then the next 4 verses are a parable that he tells them. As we uncover this passage, we will dwell on the question – Justice or Mercy?

## Stories of atrocity

**v1 At that time some people were there who told Jesus about the Galileans whom Pilate had killed while they were offering sacrifices to God.**

So as we start Luke 13, Jesus is approached by atrocity storytellers. Judea was under occupation by the Romans, who they viewed as the material manifestations of evil, led by the ruthless Pilate. These men had a story of vile to tell. Some Galilean pilgrims were hacked down by the Romans in the very act of making their temple sacrifices so that their own blood mingled with the blood of the animal sacrifices. The story is meant to shock. Imagine a terrorist getting into the rear of a church and shooting a high velocity bullet into the back of the vicar as he is holding the cup of communion, so his chest explodes and his blood gushing into the communion wine. "Jesus, you are a Galilean Jew what do you say about this shocking account."

This event is not recorded in any of their history books. However in an occupied territory whenever there is a massacre, it will spawn stories of further massacres, perhaps ten false ones for every real one, aimed

at stirring up rage towards the oppressors. In this politically tense environment, the hearers are only too happy to hear them as it enforces their own convictions and perhaps prejudices too. The teller and the listener together are stirred towards rage, which has the benefit of encouraging people to support the rebellion with a passion they may not have otherwise had, and thus carry out heroic acts of retaliation. Woe Betide anyone who stops and questions the validity of such stories.

The motivation of those approaching Jesus is unknown. It may have been zealots looking for the approval of Jesus for their anti-establishment actions. Or perhaps less likely it may have been a trap to get Jesus to speak out unwisely against the authorities and then pin him down for it.

However if the story is true, those killed by Pilate would almost certainly been known freedom fighters that had killed Roman soldiers or threatened Roman peace in some other way. Yet Jesus is expected to condemn Pilate for his heinous ungodly acts. 'How long O God, must we suffer. Hear the cries of the people and destroy the house of the Romans' ! He doesn't.

### **Is suffering linked to sin?**

Whether Jesus believes their atrocity story or not, he is not going to play their game. He recognises that behind their story, that they have a commonly held belief that suffering came as a result of your own sins, or those of your forefathers. He starts by addressing this with a rebuff.

<sup>2</sup> **Jesus answered them, "Because those Galileans were killed in that way, do you think it proves that they were worse sinners than all other Galileans?"** <sup>3</sup> **No indeed! And I tell you that if you do not turn from your sins, you will all die as they did.** Jesus uses this atrocity report, to remind the tellers of their own spiritual decay, and the need for them to sort out their own house, and turn away from the wrong deeds in their own lives. Political zealots are looking for a response which supports their own view of what justice should be in the light of their suffering, and are not expecting a lecture on their own morals. Such a response was so unexpected and inflammatory it is a surprise that Jesus was not attacked for saying it.

We see elsewhere Jesus addressing this issues such as when Jesus came across a man born blind (John 9 v1-3). His disciples asked him, "Teacher, whose sin caused him to be born blind? Was it his own or his parents' sin?" Jesus answered, "His blindness has nothing to do with his sins or his parents' sins. He is blind so that God's power might be seen at work in him."

Then Jesus tells them if they do not turn away from their own sinful life-styles then they will perish. He is not saying talking about just physical death here, because all people die whether you have turned away from yours sins or no. You can't escape death by behaving like God wants you too. Neither is your life made shorter or longer depending on your behaviour, or that of your ancestors, unless of course it is a self-destructive life-style that you adopt.

Therefore, even in the absence of persecution, death can come unexpectedly to anyone, irrespective of how righteous or how sinful they are. He may have been emphasizing that the time granted by God for repentance is limited. The same word for 'perish' is used in the most famous of all gospel passages, John 3v16. **"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.** So *perish* here is something more than just to die a physical death, but of the eternal separation from God you face if you die without putting yourself right with God, or in our case accepting the salvation that Jesus brought us by his death on the cross. It is the alternative to eternal life with Jesus.

### **Accidents happen**

Jesus then reinforces the point with reference to a recent tragedy that must have been well known about in that region at the time.

<sup>v4</sup> **What about those eighteen people in Siloam who were killed when the tower fell on them? Do you suppose this proves that they were worse than all the other people living in Jerusalem?** <sup>v6</sup> **No indeed! And I tell you that if you do not turn from your sins, you will all die as they did."**

There was a pool at Siloam which was in Jerusalem just outside the old city walls. A tower in Siloam had collapsed, and it may well have been a building project sponsored by Pilate, perhaps an aqueduct. Jesus is bringing to closer to home for the listeners. These are not hot-headed Galilean freedom fighters from the North but are residents of Jerusalem who have taken the opposite response to the Romans. They have accepted their new rulers, with total acquiesced and joined them in working on their building projects. But they are no worse sinners because of this than anyone else living in Jerusalem, including the listeners. They have not been punished by God for working the Romans, just like the Galileans were not punished for fighting them.

Jesus is making the point that whilst people may die at the hands of oppressors, others die in terrible accidents. Such things happen. Neither are punishments from God.

This year in the UK a terrorist bomb at a pop concert at the Manchester Arena killed 22 people and we are outraged at this politically (and Islamic) motivated attack, an atrocity story. Then a few weeks later 80 people die in the Grenfell Tower fire in London, a building tragedy. Which was the bigger tragedy a teenage girl dying in the Arena because of the bomb, or a teenage girl dying in Grenfell tower because of the fire. Neither both are equal tragedy for them and their families. Who deserved it more. Neither. No one got what they deserved. No-one died because they were punished by God.

A loss is a loss, as is every one of those 2000 that die in this country from traffic accidents each year.

We could make a big deal about how such things should never happen, and do what we can to prevent them happening again. But acts of violence, buildings collapsing, fires, and other tragic deaths do happen, and they are not acts of punishment from God for bad behaviour.

It sounds obvious, but we get sucked into it that mindset. "He was evil, he deserved what he got" or "She was so loving and kind, she didn't deserve to die". Jesus saying what is important is not how we die, but the state of our lives, and our relationship with God when we do die. We must avoid dying of old age, sickness or tragedy without having putting our lives right with God.

### **Inviting Calamity**

We have to also be careful not to bring calamity on ourselves. I saw a you-tube video this week of a man named the LA Beast who broke a world record by eating 8 quarter pound bars of butter in about 3 minutes. This was not his first attempt. If he dies of a heart attack from high cholesterol it won't be a surprise. Similarly those who base jump off mountains, or those who race speed boats are more likely to die early.

Similarly if you are triggering the wrath of the Romans by stirring people to carry out frequent revolts against them, then surely it will not be long until there is a back-lash which threatens everything you hold dear including the very temple itself. Jesus could see where the actions of these Jewish zealots was leading. He never got involved in political kingdoms, as he was all about establishing the kingdom of heaven on earth. Ironically these hated Romans eventually played a much bigger part in spreading the message and purposes of God, through promoting the Christian faith, than the Jewish leaders ever did.

Similarly as a country we can corporately act in ways which distance ourselves from our God, and our Christian heritage, distancing ourselves from's Gods will and protection, and by unwise actions or neglect open the doors to more terrorism and accidents. But this is of our own doing not Gods.

The important thing to remember is that whatever happens, he is with us in our beginnings and with is in our ends, during the tragedies, even though we often find it harder to recognise him in them. He said he will never leave us or forsake us. We do not know what tomorrow holds, so we should put ourselves right with Jesus today, make sure that as we go into each day, we are walking with him, under his protection, so at least then we know that when our time is up, however it happens, it is his appointed time for us, and with joy we can transfer departments to spend eternity with him in heaven.

## The Vineyard

Jesus having no doubt outraged his story-tellers, was not about to let it rest there. He told them this parable. v6 ***“There was once a man who had a fig tree growing in his vineyard. He went looking for figs on it but found none.***

Jesus starts with familiar territory with this story. There is the owner of a vineyard. Immediately the listeners are identifying with the vineyard as being ‘the House of Israel’ the Jewish people. As the psalmist declares ***“You transplanted a vine from Egypt; you drove out the nations and planted it. <sup>9</sup>You cleared the ground for it, and it took root and filled the land.”*** (Ps 80v8-9). The owner of the vineyard is always God. In one of the Old Testaments few parables there is the one Isaiah told (Is 5v1-6) where the owner had planned, built and planted a most splendid vineyard, but instead of producing good fruit, it produced wild vines with its poisonous and foul-smelling berries. What will God do this vineyard says Isaiah to the people of Judah, he will not only abandon it but oversee its destruction. Clearly the vines were Gods people, the Jews, who had been planted in the promised land but had been unfruitful. From this vine, he had wanted the fruit of justice but found oppression, he wanted righteousness but found violence. They would be allowed to bring about their own calamity, the Babylonian invasion would fulfil the prophecy and see to their destruction.

However in the Jesus parable, the focus is not on the vines but on a fig tree that is growing amongst the vines. Not unusual, the fig tree in Palestine bears fruit 10 months of the year, so the owner should be guaranteed some fruit for most of the year. In Old Testament the vine and the fig tree taken together are a symbol of peace e.g. Micah 4v4). In contrast to the Isaiah parable the owner of this vineyards is concerned about making the vineyard more fruitful

not about destroying it, and he asks some serious questions about one plant, the fig tree. It is unfruitful whilst its roots are sapping strength from the vines.

I once bought a fig tree, and though I wasn’t expecting a huge harvest, I was expecting something, but after many years there is not a single fig, or even anything that might grow into one. But then England’s climate isn’t known for encouraging an abundance of figs. No excuse for the one in the parable though.

### Dig it out

***V7 . So he said to his gardener, ‘Look, for three years I have been coming here looking for figs on this fig tree, and I haven’t found any. Dig it out! Why should it go on using up the soil?’***

The owner discusses this serious situation with the gardener or vine dresser. In those days you would give a tree three years to grow, then the next 3 years the fruit was forbidden, so the first year a fruit could be picked is on a 7 year old tree. But he has been coming for 3 years now, the trees 9<sup>th</sup> year and still no fruit. The Master has been patient so far with the fig tree, long beyond the expected time for it to bear fruit, but it looks hopeless, just like my own fig tree that I have had for 9 years. It is not only taking up space where a fruitful plant could be but is draining strength from the ground, and impacting on the fruitfulness of the vines. So to benefit the soil and the vines, the owner orders the Fig tree to be dug out and got rid off.

In the parable the fig tree represents the leaders of the people, and quite enough time has passed for the current leaders of the nation to produce the fruits expected of it, including the fruit of repentance. God has been very patient with them, but they are long overdue in producing fruit. The hearers of the parable might be expecting this judgement now on the leaders, just as was the case in another parable he told on the vineyard and the tenants. However the story takes an unexpected turn.

### Forgive it

***<sup>8</sup>But the gardener answered, ‘Leave it alone, sir, just one more year; I will dig around it and put in some manure. <sup>9</sup>Then if the tree bears figs next year, so much the better; if not, then you can have it cut down.’***

In the Isaiah parable, the vines are poisonous and will be destroyed. No hope is offered. Judgement will be served. In this parable, the gardener offers up hope for the fig tree. Hope for the spiritual leaders of Israel. He will dig around the tree and puts some manure around it, and wait a bit. Some of Jesus’ humour

comes through here. The leaders were a powerful bunch. The former high priest (who retained his title), his 5 sons and his son-in-law Caiaphas had a tight grip on the top jobs in the temple. For those that got the meaning of the parable, the thought of these leaders needing manure must have raised a smile or two.

But here in the parable, Jesus is giving separate voices to Justice and Mercy. The owner seeks Justice, the gardener seeks Mercy. The unfruitful fig tree is impacting the health of the vineyard. The unrepentant unfruitful leadership of the Jews is producing an unfruitful nation. For the sake of the people, the leaders should be dug out and got rid off. This is what they deserve, this is justice. But there is hope for them yet. Within their own capability they have no hope whatsoever; they will remain unfruitful and lead the people astray.

It was common practice to dig a trench around trees and fill it with manure, but not for fig trees as they normally didn't need it. So here is the gardener going the extra mile, doing everything he can to save the tree. They have already had more than enough time to show some fruit, but if Jesus could just have a bit more time to get through to them, try and show them what God is doing through him, and their need for repentance. He will go the extra mile on their behalf. If they could only repent in the same way that many of the people have, including Prostitutes and Tax Collectors, then they could still be fruitful and be saved, and work alongside Jesus to bring in the Kingdom of God. However if they do not respond in time to God's intervention in their lives, then they will bring tragedy on themselves and perish.

### **Destruction**

So as we look back on this passage in Luke 13, we can see that Jesus has given warnings to the atrocity story tellers on the fate of the zealots or freedom fighters, what will happen if they are so caught up in their cause and don't turn away from their bad ways and come back to God. Regardless of how bad their oppression and how good they may see their cause, without repentance all will be lost. At the same time he give out this warning to the Jewish leaders. They need to do likewise, receive advise and help from Jesus, and turn their lives around, or all that they know and love will be lost forever. Because of God's mercy, both have an opportunity to do this, but time will run out and if they don't respond they will face God's judgement.

History tells us what happened. They refused to repent and live under God's Mercy so instead died under God's judgement. In AD 66, whilst the early Church was getting established with its base still in Jerusalem, the acts of the Procurator Florus incensed a Jewish rebellion and the Jews took back control over Jerusalem and Judea, killing thousands of Romans, and even took control over the fortress palace in Masada. Nero kicked back and send his General Vespasian with an army to fight the Jews, and later when Nero died, Vespasian embroiled in a leadership contest, appointed his son Titus to continue the war on the Jews. In AD70, Jerusalem finally fell, and the Roman soldiers were so angry with the Jews that they burnt the temple to the ground. This ended the zealot rebellions and the whole system of temple power and sacrifices that the chief priests and Pharisees had thrived on. The Jewish freedom fighters and the Jewish leaders faced judgement and destruction. Jesus and his mercy had been rejected, so judgement took its toll.

### **The trinity**

Some would look at this passage and interpret the owner as God the Father and the gardener or vinedresser as Jesus the Son, with opposing roles. Father God is saying there must be justice, but the Son is pleading mercy on behalf of the person or people. But this cannot be right, because this would mean disunity in the trinity of God, whereas the three are one. They have different roles and personalities and characteristics but they are at one with each other. There is no disunity in the trinity.

God is holy, and can not be in Sin. When I dwell on the Genesis story I see the Garden of Eden as mankind dwelling in God's presence as intended, but when sin comes into the world, mankind lost his peace with God, and had to be separated from the presence of God. Yet the aspect of God which is Jesus the Son, creates the way back to God through his blood spilt on the cross. If you have given your life over to following Jesus, then you have a claim on his blood. This blood is the greatest gift anyone can give you because God sees the blood of Jesus on you and not your sins, and it means that justice can be upheld

and the price of your wrongdoings can be paid for because of what Jesus has done for you. That is the Grace and Mercy of God. Yet your case still has to be made for you, but the trinity provides that too. God provides the Holy Spirit as your advocate, your lawyer, to make this case for you in Heaven. This spirit of God dwells with you and within you as your encourager, your strength, and your lawyer making your case for cleanliness, so that you can enjoy Gods presence and peace as always intended.

### Sorting yourself out first

Yesterday I flew back from and the air stewardess told us what to do if the cabin depressurises. Oxygen masks will fall from above our seats, and we are to sort out our own oxygen first before helping our children or anyone else out. And that's what Jesus is saying in Luke 13, we need to put ourselves right first, put on our own oxygen mask, and breathe in the Spirit of God. It is the spirit that applies Gods mercy to our souls. He will help us turn our lives around and show those first fruits of repentance that Jesus so wanted to see evident in the lives of the Jewish leaders. Accept his Mercy, and then we can share his mercy with others. But is it that easy?

### The conflict

Our property is vandalised. We are taunted or verbally abused. We are physically attacked. We are cheated, lied about or slandered. We are taken advantage of. It can make us feel angry, bitter resentful, even depressed. We have all been there, haven't we? How do we respond? They don't deserve Mercy – no that's right, if they did then it wouldn't be mercy. Do we want revenge or are we keen to forgive. <pause> So we must look to our Lord for the example on how to respond.

God can not compromise his holiness, so there is a need for judgement and justice, but he will look for **every** opportunity to show his Mercy. God will forgive us again, and again, and again. Wherever possible Mercy will triumph over judgement.

Mercy is the mark of God, Right throughout the bible, again and again we see that God is mercy. In the King James version Psalm 25v10, says that “**all roads that lead to God are Mercy and truth**”. We can not even get anywhere near God from any direction without experiencing his mercy. Because the very essence of God is Love, he desires Mercy over and over.

The **lack** of Mercy is the mark of sin and evil. In Romans 1 there is a great list of what makes man evil, idolatry, immorality,,pride, murder, deceit, envy, spitefulness etc. But right at the end of this list, is lack of mercy, almost as a punch-line to sum it all up is , mercilessness. Sin show no mercy. This was embodied in the Nazi regime. Hitler said these words in August 1939 :-

*I have placed my death-head formations in readiness with orders to them to send to death **mercilessly and without compassion**, men, women, and children of Polish derivation and language. Only then will we gain the living space that we need.*

*Evil shows no mercy. Not so with God.*

### Learning from Gods example

In the Old Testament we see the Lords presence dwelling close amongst his people in the Ark of the Covenant, on the golden slab that was the MERCY seat.

In the New Testament everything about Jesus modelled compassion and mercy. Even in this parable we see him wanting to give the leaders of the Jews another year to repent. They actually got given another 40 years before eventually they brought destruction on themselves and their temple at the hands of Titus.

Jesus, was on the cross, with the voices of those very leaders taunting and abusing him, Did he say “I am coming back in three days, and when I do you have had it, I'll make you roast slowly in Hell. No even then, he showed Mercy – “Forgive them Father for they know not what they are doing”.

Paul in his final letters to Timothy, starts with the greeting, May the lord send you Grace, Mercy and Peace. Peace is symbolised in the Old Testament as in Micah4v4 by the fig tree with the vine as we see in

our parable. We take Gods unfathomable peace with us. His Grace is us getting what we don't deserve, and his Mercy is us not getting what we do deserve. Paul got to the end of his life realising how much Mercy he had received from God.

You do not have a spiteful God that will subject you to atrocities, or building accidents, or terminal illnesses because you have misbehaved, but he is a God that gives you every opportunity to respond to him in love, and takes every opportunity to show you mercy, to give you another chance, and another, and another. Why because God is love, and he loves you far more than you could ever know.

### **Our challenge**

So how **do** we respond to those who come against us?

In every situation we should try and respond in the way that is the most loving towards the other person. Sometimes discipline and some level of punishment **is** the most loving response and the best outcome for that person in the short term, and we also must respect the law of our country, but let us pray that those times are few and far between. Wherever we can, we must respond with forgiveness and mercy. Do I forgive 7 times asks Peter. No says Jesus 70x7 and keep going! Why because we have been shown so much mercy ourselves, we have been forgiven so much ourselves, we must respond to the Mercy from God, with Mercy to other.

I believe Jesus calls us every day, however difficult the circumstance, at every opportunity, to forgive others, turn the other cheek, and let **mercy** triumph over judgement.

Amen