

## What a Sacrifice!

A staged reading or play based on Matthew 9: 1--26

Common Lectionary June 8, 2008: Matthew 9: 9--13, 18--26

By Dorian Scott Cole

**Background:** As a teacher early in his ministry, Jesus used many metaphors and sayings to deliver his message to crowds of Jews. In this passage, he establishes his “authority” from God through miracles. He speaks for God, saying “Your sins are forgiven” and “I desire mercy, not sacrifice.” He shows mercy to all who come to him. A woman touches his garment and he tells her her faith has made her well. He truly has no bias - he also visits a ruler whose daughter has died, and she lives. The religious elite continue to accuse him and try to trip him, but he avoids incurring their wrath with direct confrontation.

The theme of this passage is that God’s mercy is central to his message. “I desire mercy, not sacrifice,” explains his mission to the shunned and sick, the unforgiven, and why he didn’t need to come to the religious elite. Sacrificing was a primary part of Jewish religion, and had become institutionalized at the Temple in unfitting ways. The trappings of a religion that had become partners with the government, such as sacrificing and fasting, feasting, and socializing only with the elite, are not what God asks of us. It was an important part of his message on what has priority – religion or people. In several similar passages he put before them, what do you put first, the sacrifice, the fast, the Sabbath, or human need? To the religious elite he was also saying in a backhanded way, “God wants mercy – when are you going to do this.”

### Key concept:

1. Forgiveness brings people closer to God and transforms lives.
2. Ancient Greek *eleos*: mercy, meaning compassion.

As a staged reading this is presented with minimal props, minimal action, and lines may be read aloud. As a short play, minimal props are required.

This play includes a children’s sermon.

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## Props for *What a Sacrifice!*

Microphone.

## Cast

Jesus

Drufus

Congregation 1, 2, 3

Interviewer

Interviewee 1, 2, 3

## Setting

Limbo setting – no backdrop or furniture. Church people and interview groups can be seated or standing.

**Time:** Present day, timeless.

## Blocking

Blocking isn't critical, but there should be space between group 2 and 3. There are three groups. Group 1, Jesus and Drufus, remain illuminated (if lighting is used), and roam between the other two groups. Group 2, 3 church people, can be to stage right, and are illuminated on occasion. Group 3, Interviewer and 1 Interviewee, can be to stage left, and are illuminated on occasion.

## Costumes

Today's casual contemporary attire - no other costumes are necessary.

## Music

## Playing time

Approximately 3 minutes.

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## Children's Sermon

**Props:** If wanted: a toy, and some candy which will also be given to the children at the end of the sermon.

What does it mean to be merciful to others?

Does merciful mean some way that we treat other people?

How can we be merciful to others? If I know someone who can't afford to buy toys, what can I do that is merciful?

Sometimes we share toys with others who don't have them, sometimes we give them one of our toys, and sometimes we buy them toys and give them to them. All are merciful.

What if someone hurts us, what can we do?

Can we forgive someone who hurts us? If I say, "I forgive you," and that person feels good again. Is that merciful? Does that hurt us?

If I see someone who is hungry, what can I do that is merciful?

Sometimes we share food with others who don't have food, sometimes we give them some of our food, sometimes we buy them food and give it to them, and sometimes we give them money to buy food. All are merciful things to do.

What if I just don't eat for today - is that merciful? No that hurts. It's called sacrifice.

But Jesus said, "I want mercy, not sacrifice."

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What a Sacrifice drama ACT 1 (of 1)

**DRUFUS IS BOWED BEFORE JESUS.**

DRUFUS

Father, forgive me. I am waist deep in my failings. I am no good to anyone. Everywhere I turn, I do the wrong thing – it's as if I can't help myself. I am cursed.

JESUS

Drufus, rise and hold your head high. Today you are forgiven for your failings and wrong turns. Today you are a new person and you can begin again.

DRUFUS

(Makes a face.)

Wait. That means I'll have to try really hard. Maybe I can be just a little less forgiven – kind of lower the expectations a little. I don't think I can make the sacrifice of giving up all of my failings all at once.

JESUS

God is merciful. He will hold you in his arms and help you.

DRUFUS

Oh, I don't know.

JESUS

God is truly merciful. Follow me and you will learn what I mean, "I desire mercy, not sacrifice."

**THEY TURN ON THE STAGE TO A GROUP OF CHURCH PEOPLE. PERSON 1, 2, AND 3 ARE LAUGHING AT THEIR JOKES.**

PEOPLE FADE IN

PERSON 1

Hey, we have a mafia guy in our congregation. I'm probably putting myself in danger even talking about him.

ALL LAUGH.

PERSON 3

If you tell us, he'll have to kill you.

ALL LAUGH.

PERSON 2

Aw, go on. We can keep a secret. I won't tell the mafia guy in our congregation.

PERSON 3

I want my token mafia guy. How come you guys get one and I don't?

ALL LAUGH.

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PERSON 1

Anyway, he goes out and robs from the poor, sells drugs, beats people, maybe even murders – who knows – and then he comes to church and wants the blessings of God as if nothing is wrong in his life. What a sacrifice this guy is making for God.

ALL LAUGH.

PERSON 3

Yeah, like God will send a little mercy his way.

ALL LAUGH.

JESUS AND DRUFUS TURN AWAY.

PEOPLE FADE OUT

DRUFUS

Is that what you mean by mercy? Can that mafia guy get mercy? No way!

JESUS

God is merciful to everyone if they ask for forgiveness. He must try to change his ways.

INTERVIEWER FADE IN

THEY NOW SEE A MAN ON THE STREET INTERVIEW AND COME CLOSE TO THE **INTERVIEWER** AS HE STOPS **INTERVIEWEE 1**.

INTERVIEWER

What do you think of today's clergy? Do they sacrifice enough?

INTERVIEWEE 1

Well, let's see, some of them abuse children, some cheat on their spouses with prostitutes, some rake in millions of dollars and build lavish estates. I guess if that's sacrifice, a few of them are very successful at it.

INTERVIEWEE 1 STARTS TO WALK AWAY.

INTERVIEWER

Wait, wait. What about the rest of them?

INTERVIEWEE 1 CONTINUES WALKING AWAY.

INTERVIEWEE 1

Who cares?

INTERVIEWER FADE OUT

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DRUFUS

Is that what you mean about mercy? The clergy can be forgiven? No way!

PEOPLE FADE IN

JESUS

God is merciful to everyone if they ask for forgiveness. They must try to change their ways.

JESUS AND DRUFUS APPROACH THE CHURCH PEOPLE TO LISTEN.

PERSON 2

There is a man in our congregation who attends church every service. I think if we had a midnight prayer service, he would be there every night. He prays six times a day, and fasts. What a sacrifice this man makes!

PERSON 1

What does he do for the poor?

PERSON 2

Oh, he guards his pocketbook like it was Fort Knox. He never gives to anyone or anything.

PEOPLE FADE OUT

DRUFUS

That's not right? I have a heart of gold – I would help anyone... If I ever had any money –

Interviewer Fade in

JESUS

God is merciful to everyone – don't judge him and you will not be judged. You do what you can do.

JESUS WALKS TOWARD INTERVIEWER. INTERVIEWER IS STOPPING INTERVIEWEE 2.

INTERVIEWER

What do you think of the clergy? Do they sacrifice enough?

INTERVIEWEE 2

I never see him. He's always planning some big religious celebration and a big feast. It seems like this is all he ever does. Who knows?

INTERVIEWEE 2 WALKS AWAY AND INTERVIEWEE 3 APPROACHES AND IS STOPPED BY INTERVIEWER.

INTERVIEWER

What do you think of the clergy? Do they sacrifice enough?



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INTERVIEWEE 3

What do you mean by sacrifice? Do you mean giving money and fasting and giving up meat at Lent?

INTERVIEWER

What do you think I mean?

INTERVIEWEE 3

I don't think our pastor has time for sacrifice. I mean, he is always helping the poor with food and transportation, helping the blind get around, helping the sick at the hospital, helping abused people, helping people know that God loves them enough to forgive them, and that God helps them, and if that isn't enough he speaks out for the oppressed for justice and equality and fair compensation. I guess that's a sacrifice for him. Who would have time for any more sacrifice.

INTERVIEWER FADE OUT

JESUS TURNS TO DRUFUS.

JESUS

That pastor is a person who is truly merciful, like God. Now you know what I mean by, "I desire mercy, not sacrifice?"

WORRIED LOOK ON DRUFUS FACE.

DRUFUS

This forgiveness and mercy thing - can I put this off until... you know... just not today? I gotta' work up to this.

(continued)

DRUFUS TURNS AWAY AND LOOKS AT WATCH.

Maybe tomorrow – yeah, tomorrow's good.

DRUFUS WALKS AWAY AND JESUS SMILES AFTER HIM.

JESUS

Drufus, you require a lot of mercy.

## Scriptures quoted (NIV)

Matthew 9:9--13 (New International Version)

New International Version (NIV)

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9 As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him.

10 While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and "sinners" came and ate with him and his disciples. 11 When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and 'sinners'?"

12 On hearing this, Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. 13 But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' [a] For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

### Jesus Questioned About Fasting

14 Then John's disciples came and asked him, "How is it that we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?"

15 Jesus answered, "How can the guests of the bridegroom mourn while he is with them? The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; then they will fast.

16 "No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch will pull away from the garment, making the tear worse. 17 Neither do men pour new wine into old wineskins. If they do, the skins will burst, the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved."

### A Dead Girl and a Sick Woman

18 While he was saying this, a ruler came and knelt before him and said, "My daughter has just died. But come and put your hand on her, and she will live." 19 Jesus got up and went with him, and so did his disciples.

20 Just then a woman who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak. 21 She said to herself, "If I only touch his cloak, I will be healed."

22 Jesus turned and saw her. "Take heart, daughter," he said, "your faith has healed you." And the woman was healed from that moment.

23 When Jesus entered the ruler's house and saw the flute players and the noisy crowd, 24 he said, "Go away. The girl is not dead but asleep." But they laughed at him. 25 After the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took the girl by the hand, and she got up. 26 News of this spread through all that region.