

**Sermon: These Ancient Words and The Soul****Scripture: Matthew 9:9-13****Preacher: Rev. Will Burhans****Date: June 7, 2026**

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There is something that these ancient words the choir is singing from Haydn's mass, something that the Kyrie, the Gloria, the Sanctus, do for our souls. "Lord, have mercy, Christ have mercy, Lord have mercy." The Kyrie comes from Christian liturgy developed in the 300's CE. So for over 1,700 years people have been praying that line. Why should we not? It is a profound prayer. Next time you are in need, struggling, gripped by fear or anxiety or anger or sorrow, try pray it. Don't dismiss it as something that Catholics pray during the eucharist. It is a prayer that is at the root of our tradition too. It is our birthright as well to have access to Christ in this way, this cry to Christ for mercy. "Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy, Lord have mercy." Say it over and over again and see what effect it has on you. People have prayed it and sung it and proclaimed it across the ages reminding themselves of God's mercy, of Christ's love, and that at the heart of it all is The Merciful Heart. Our souls need to hear that and remember that. "Lord have mercy. Christ have mercy. Lord have mercy."

And there's the Gloria - "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to those of goodwill." You remember where that comes from don't you? From the great hymn that the angels sang to the shepherds at Christ's birth. We read it every Christmas. It was drawn into Christian liturgy within the first century of the church, proclaiming what the angels proclaimed is a good thing for our souls - "Glory to you O God in the highest and peace on earth!" We could use some more souls praying that one on a regular basis,

couldn't we? One of the modes of prayer that has always been a part of the church and that shows up in spades in these ancient prayers is praise. In any worded, not silent, prayer, there can be the elements of gratitude, petition, intercession, confession, and also and maybe most important of all praise. Not because God is an authoritarian whose ego requires our praise but because our souls are made alive and awakened by the praise their Creator. And when we are praising God, at least for that moment, we are not seeking praise for ourselves and at least for that moment we are not venerating other human beings in ways that set them up on pedestals from which they fall and at least for that moment we are remembering where it all comes from and where it's all going and where true honor and glory belong, for our lives, for creation, for all that is good and right and beautiful... Glory to You O God in the highest, above all others, and peace and goodwill among all men... not women, just men. I'm kidding, but given that men have been the power holders for so long maybe that's appropriate that we pray for peace and goodwill among them in particular. Glory to You O God. Not to me, not to them, but to You.

The Sanctus. The Holy, Holy Holy. Another beauty of a proclamation, which comes from a combination of an Old Testament Isaiah passage and a New Testament Gospel of Matthew passage. Isaiah chapter 6 opens with this drama that Maeve read for us... **I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple. <sup>2</sup> Above him were seraphim, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. <sup>3</sup> And they were calling to one another:**

**“Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty;  
the whole earth is full of his glory.”**

It's an incredible mystical moment for the prophet Isaiah that has come down to us - Holy Holy Holy - and then also from Matthew 21 verse 9 comes the second half of the phrase from the Sanctus which is also known as the Benedictus and you'll know where this comes from - "Blessed is the One who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest!" You have these words of mystical awe with angels proclaiming how almighty God is and then the immediate pointing to Jesus who comes to us humble and riding on a donkey, which we celebrated on Palm Sunday. You have the angels covering their feet as a sign of humility before God, like Moses taking off his shoes on holy ground, and then you have Jesus enter in on the donkey. Humility is the spiritual path toward God and that's why we offer praise and why we confess.

And finally, the choir will close our service with the Agnus Dei - "lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world, have mercy on us." It flows from the tongue as though the tongue were meant to say it. And after it's said a couple of times the last time the phrase is changed to - "Lamb of God you take away the sin of the world, grant us peace." It too was a prayer prayed in the early centuries of the church's liturgy. It too has something to do with the very foundations of human culture and the very seat of our souls, the lamb being the innocent victim of human systems where it is determined one must be sacrificed for the good of others. It's the Jesus story. It's our story. And as true as the day is long. To pray it is to allow it purchase in our lives and in the life of the world - "lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world, have mercy on us." It can be a mantra if you replace the "us" with the names of those you are praying for - Lamb of God you take away the sin of the world, have mercy on Jake. Lamb of God you take away the sin of the world, have mercy on Jessica. Lamb of God you take away the sin of the

world, have mercy on this enemy of mine, cause remember Jesus asks us to pray for those who persecute us. This is a way of doing that. I don't even have to want mercy for my enemies in order to pray the prayer. It's God's mercy, not mine that is needed and which I'm beseeching God for. But funny how it turns the heart in the end towards mercy anyway.

We in our culture have turned from these ancient prayers as we've begun to leave church, these prayers and the other symbols and rites and rituals that the Christian faith has set down for us. But the thing is is that we haven't left religion behind really. Ritual, symbols, devotion, sacred places, holy days, as the Orthodox writer Kenneth B writes in his substack, have all just been transposed onto science, economics, socialism, capitalism, nationalism and other ideologies, all of which have, think about it, saints and heretics, sacred texts and forbidden texts, their own symbols and holy days and even the promise of salvation. The human being is a worshipping creature, seeking salvation from somewhere and so we're gonna find something to worship. If we don't turn to Christ and give our hearts in rituals of the faith then we'll for sure sing hymns of loyalty to our nation, for instance, and we'll believe that our nation will save us or science will save us or capitalism will save us and it's all bogus... and in the end must bring us back to the Christian truth, the way, truth and life of Christ:

It's the humility of the cross not pride of nation or human accomplishment that will save us. **Lord have mercy.**

It's generosity of spirit not grabbing more for me. **Christ have mercy.**

It's power FOR others not power over others. **Lord have mercy.**

It's the common good not merely my personal good.

**Christ have mercy.**

It's forgiveness not retribution and revenge.

**Lamb of God, have mercy on us.**

It's humble relinquishment not prideful acquisition that is the true path that save the soul.

**Lamb of God, have mercy on us.**

It's plowshares not weapons, mercy not domination, serving the poor not circling the wagons.

**Lamb of God, grant us peace.**

It's Jesus' way and truth and life that saves us. **Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy, Lord have mercy.**