

Lord, have mercy

By [Diane Roth](#)

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The summer has brought some changes, big and small, to the congregation where I am a pastor. Of course, the big one is a new senior pastor. But there have been a few little ones, including some ways that our worship services have changed. We're trying a few things in worship, without doing anything major yet: we want the congregation to be the ones who figure out what our worship identity is, and what our worship should look like.

In the meantime, we have been doing a couple of things differently: 1) we have moved the announcements to near the end of the service. We decided to do this right after our "Rally Day" worship, when the beginning of the service was delayed several minutes because people were still coming in the front door. 2) we begin worship with the "Kyrie."

I have a couple of observations regarding these changes. One is this: I should not criticize anyone for finding change difficult, because I'm sort of finding it difficult myself. Doing the announcements at the end of the service does not come naturally for me, much as I like the idea. And I'm used to beginning worship either with a song, or with confession and forgiveness, so the flow of worship seems a little odd to me, still.

But I do find myself dwelling on those three word, that most ancient prayer, "Kyrie Eleison." "Lord, have mercy." It is a confession and it is an intercession. It is the cry of a disciple, "Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner." It reminds me that prayer is not a transaction, but a gift.

The other morning I had one of those bad headaches I get every once in awhile. I haven't had one for a long time, and I forget how they feel until one of them comes along again. I caught myself praying a sort-of prayer, "God, if you will take away this headache, I promise I will do more of the things you want me to do. I promise I'll write, I'll use my time wisely, I won't procrastinate...." I was in the middle of this kind of prayer when I remembered the Kyrie, "Lord, have mercy....."

There's no bargaining, no reminding God that I'm an essentially Good Person, no promising that I will be better. The only chip I have is the mercy of God. That's it. And that is enough.

One of my high school friends, one of a different denominational persuasion, visited a Lutheran worship service one time and reported on her experience. "First you ask God to forgive you," she reported. "Then all of a sudden, you are saying, 'Lord, have mercy' again. What's up with that? Why don't you just believe you are forgiven and be done with it?"

At the time, I didn't know exactly how to answer her. Maybe it was true; maybe we did wallow a bit too much in our sinfulness. But now I am beginning to see a little more clearly: "Lord Have mercy," is the constant refrain of our lives, of our prayers. It's not that we are wallowing in our sinfulness, but that the foundation of our life is mercy.

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God is merciful. That alone is enough to transform our lives.

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