

The Fourth Sunday after Trinity | St. Luke 6:36-42
July 9, 2017 | Saude & Jerico Lutheran Churches

In Nomine Iesu

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O Lord God, heavenly Father: You are merciful, and through Christ promised us that You will neither judge nor condemn us, but graciously forgive us all our sins, and abundantly provide for all our wants of body and soul: We pray that by Your Holy Spirit You would establish in our hearts a confident faith in Your mercy, and teach us also to be merciful to our neighbor, that we may not judge or condemn others, but willingly forgive all, and, judging only ourselves, lead blessed lives in Your fear; through Your dear Son Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one true God, now and forever. Amen. (ELH, p. 159)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. (Rom. 1:7, etc.)

The sermon text for this morning is taken from the sixth chapter of the Gospel according to St. Luke. We read selected verses in Jesus' name:

[Jesus said:] "Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful. Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you." / He also told them a parable: "Can a blind man lead a blind man? Will they not both fall into a pit? A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher. / "Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me take out the speck that is in your eye,' when you yourself do not see the log that is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take out the speck that is in your brother's eye." (ESV)

These are Your words, heavenly Father. Sanctify us by Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen. (Jn. 17:17)

In Christ Jesus, the Merciful, dear fellow redeemed:

Suppose you woke up one day with a special power, but you did not know you had it. The special power is that everyone you meet immediately adopts your attitude. If you are happy, they are happy. If you are kind and gracious, they are kind and gracious. But if you are in a bad mood, they are in a bad mood. If you complain, they complain. If you act self-centered and rude, they act the same way. How much would you enjoy being around others? How pleasant would that be? I suppose it would depend on the day, wouldn't it? This is a special power you probably are not interested in having.

At the same time, the way you communicate with others does have some effect on the way they communicate with you. If you greet someone warmly, you have a much better chance of a kind response than if you shove them out of your way. If you help and befriend others, they will be much more likely to want to help and befriend you. But "*doing unto others as you would have them*

do unto you" (Lk. 6:31), should not be driven by selfish motives. If a Christian gives primarily so that he might receive, how is that different from the way unbelievers operate?

In today's text, Jesus talks about what it means to live a godly life. He does not say that our interactions with others should be based on how they treat us. He does not teach us to look out for ourselves above all else. He tells us to love instead of seeking revenge, and to forgive instead of storing up wrongs. Revealing to us the How and the Why, Jesus commands us to **"Be Merciful, Even as Your Father Is Merciful."**

I

"Being merciful" could mean a lot of different things. If I am a parent, it could mean assigning no consequences for bad behavior. If I am a banker, it could mean cancelling all debts. If I run a service organization, it could mean not charging for services rendered. These things would be merciful. But God does not command me to act in these ways. On the contrary, He commands parents to discipline their children, and says that honest work deserves an honest wage.

Jesus speaks here about a godly mercy, which takes its cue from God the Father. This is how you are to be merciful: *"even as your Father is merciful."* And how exactly is that? Psalm 103 provides a good summary of this mercy: *"The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. He will not always chide, nor will he keep his anger forever. He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities"* (vv. 8-10). What are the qualities of mercy we see here? The text says that the Lord is compassionate and loving. He does not have a quick temper, but is slow to anger. He is patient and kind. He does not dwell on the sins of mankind, but rather forgives sin.

This is also how the life of God's children should look. We should have an attitude of compassion and love, looking for opportunities to improve the life of others. We should "turn the other cheek" when we are insulted and attacked. We should not jump to conclusions about people, but have patience with them and help them. We should not store up sins against others, but forgive and forget. That is godly mercy. And it is very hard to carry out.

In fact, by our own efforts, it is impossible. If this came naturally to us, Jesus would not have to talk about it. But He knows how the old Adam operates. The LORD was there at the ugly outbreak of sin. What did Adam do when confronted with his sin? He blamed his wife, and God: *"The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate"* (Gen. 3:12). Eve played the blame game too. Your old Adam, your sinful nature, can come up with a million reasons why you should not be merciful - "She started it!" "It wasn't my fault!" "He had it coming!" "They will just throw it back in my face!" What these are, are reasons why I should not have to do the right thing. They are justification for my bad behavior in view of the bad behavior of others.

But the wrongdoing of my neighbor is no excuse for my own wrongdoing. In a sermon on today's text, Martin Luther said, "I'll do what a good tree does: Though this year's fruit is picked and enjoyed by good-for-nothing pickers, a year later it produces another crop of fruit, and doesn't get upset at all. I will react the same way, be a good tree and bear good fruit; I will not repay one evil with another evil." A little later he said that even if a prickly person—like a brier bush—scratches a Christian badly, yet "I refuse to become a brier bush because of your

actions. I shall, instead, do nothing but good for you when you are in need" (*Sermons of Martin Luther*, Vol. 2, Baker Books, 1996, p. 261). This is how a Christian is merciful even as God the Father is merciful.

II

But why must a Christian be merciful? Can't we just leave the dispensing of mercy to God? Well for one thing, Jesus commands that we be merciful. That should be good enough for us. If He tells us to do something, we should do it. But there is another reason to be merciful. This comes from recognizing what we have received from God.

When the people listened to Jesus' words, including the portion of today's text, they might have thought He went too far. They would not have liked being called hypocrites for noticing specks in their brother's eye, while logs were sticking out of their own eyes. But Jesus could say this without a hint of pride or self-righteousness. He was not a smooth-talking preacher like the rich and famous ones we see today, who display a façade of righteousness while carefully concealing their sins. Jesus had nothing to hide. He could talk about logs and specks in eyes, because He is the only one who could see them clearly. You can pull one over on your family, your friends, your co-workers, and your congregation. But you cannot pull one over on God.

God sees everything clearly. He sees the log in your eye. He sees your hypocritical behavior. He knows full well when you have been unmerciful, judgmental, unforgiving, and selfish. But the Lord does not measure back to you in wrath what you have produced in sin. He gives you a generous measure of His grace, "*pressed down, shaken together, running over.*" He puts it right in your lap through the proclamation of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments! Why would He do that? Because He is merciful.

He is, as He declared Himself to Moses, "*a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin*" (Ex. 34:6-7). This is how He looks upon you. This is why He sent Jesus to be your Substitute. He does not judge you by your sinful life, but by the holy life of Jesus. He does not condemn you for your transgressions, because He condemned Jesus in your place.

Like me, you can look back and recall many moments that you picked at the speck in another person's eye while a log was protruding from yours. In tearing down your neighbors and making them feel pain, you felt a little bit better about yourself. You thought that if you could expose the sin of others, it might somehow make your sin seem less significant, less serious. But the guilt is still there. You know who you are and what you have done. You know the good things you have failed to do.

And yet God still has mercy upon you. He still loves you. All your sins and failures and unkindness He has transferred to His Son, who atoned for them all. Such mercy is so far above us, so strange to our way of thinking. Nothing in the world is like this mercy of God. It cannot be measured. One hymnwriter described God's love as a "bottomless abyss." He said, "O Love, Thou bottomless abyss, / My sins are swallowed up in thee! / Covered is my unrighteousness, / Nor spot of guilt remains on me, / While Jesus' blood, through earth and skies / Mercy, free, boundless mercy! cries" (ELH #499, v. 3).

This other-worldly mercy is what Jesus calls His followers to have toward their neighbors – to love even when love is not returned, to forgive even when no remorse is shown, to be charitable even when help is not deserved. This is how we disciples will be like our Teacher, because this is how He is toward us. An attitude of mercy is not easy to have. We would rather have an attitude of selfishness and revenge. But then we shouldn't be surprised when the same sinful attitude is reflected back at us. Jesus said, *"For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you."*

This is why we ask the Lord to help us **"Be Merciful, Even as [Our] Father Is Merciful."** We want others to see in us the effect of God's love and kindness. We want them to know that there is hope for the wicked and pardon for guilt. We want them to hear the comforting message that the Father's mercy is big enough to cover even the greatest sinner, even sinners like you and me.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.

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