

The Fourth Sunday after Trinity
St. Luke 6:36-42: "Is There Something in Your Eye?"
July 13/14, 2019 | Saude, Jerico, & Redeemer Lutheran Churches

In Nomine Iesu

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Merciful God and Father, You make Your sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and show kindness unto the thankful and unto the thankless, teach us by Your Holy Spirit, we humbly ask You, to have compassion on all men, covering our neighbor's faults and frailties, being always ready to forgive and showing forth everywhere the fruits of faith; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, ever one God, now and forever. Amen. (*The Lutheran Liturgy*, p. 142)

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

The sermon text for today 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, who looks upon us not as we deserve but according to His grace, dear fellow redeemed:

We can all think of people who have no business pointing out the sins in others. Their sins are so obvious and clear that they are in no position to judge what anyone else does. Jesus talks about the log in a person's eye. It's quite a picture. Imagine a long plank sticking out of someone's eye. But suppose the person did not notice it was there. He shows up at a party and starts talking about what is wrong with other people—how they look, how annoying they are, how he has everything together, and how they could learn a lot from him.

He does not understand why everyone wants to keep their distance, and why they get so angry whenever he shows up. That eye log is a hindrance to personal interaction! It pops people on the nose and smacks them on the side of the face whenever he turns his head. He complains about everyone blaming him. Why don't they watch where they are going and give him more space?

It's a ridiculous scenario. How could a person not know that a big log is sticking out of his eye? How could he not notice that? The problem with this guy is that he does not understand his problem. He thinks everyone around him is at fault for his feelings of rejection and discomfort. He is the victim. If everyone around him changed, he would be happier, and he assumes they would be too.

What Jesus is teaching about here is self-righteousness, about not being aware of one's own glaring sins. A self-righteous person is a person who believes he is holy through his own efforts. It makes sense that Jesus would warn the Pharisees and scribes about this because they thought they were right with God through their keeping of the law. They did not realize how far they had fallen short. They were very prideful.

But Jesus did not speak the words of today's text to the Pharisees and scribes. He spoke them to "His disciples" (Luk. 6:20), to those who believed in Him and followed Him. He told these disciples to take the logs out of their own eyes. He even called them "hypocrites"! This shows that Jesus was not afraid to criticize His followers. But He wasn't doing it out of spite; it was out of love.

Jesus wanted His followers to see their own weakness and to understand the sinful condition of all descendants of Adam and Eve. He could speak in this way because He was without sin. He had been conceived in Mary's womb by the power of the Holy Spirit and was therefore free of original sin. He fully understood temptation to sin, but He committed no sin Himself.

He told His disciples to guard against the self-righteousness that was part of their sinful nature. They needed to hear the condemning words of the law, so that they would be humbled and cry out for God's grace. They needed to see that they were no better than anyone else around them, either the Jews or the Gentiles.

The same goes for us. We are no better than anyone else, but the devil and our sinful nature try to convince us that we are. They tempt us to measure our righteousness by how much holier we are than others. But it isn't a fair comparison. We typically do not look at others the same way that we look at ourselves. We see their sins more clearly than we see our own sins. We are much more ready to overlook our faults than the faults of others.

So it might be easy for me to justify telling a lie, but I come down harshly on others who do the same. Or I might be critical of a mess someone made, but I am totally unwilling to acknowledge my own messes. Self-righteousness is holding someone's feet to the fire for a \$100 debt, while being unconcerned about your own \$100,000 debt. Self-righteousness is being eager to offer criticism but being totally unwilling to receive criticism.

Our self-righteousness is the reason Jesus reminds us to "be merciful," to "judge not," to "condemn not," to "forgive," and to "give." He wants us to be humble and regard others as better than ourselves (Phi. 2:3). He wants us to look into the mirror of His holy law and see our many sins in that reflection. He wants us to repent of these sins and look to Him for forgiveness and for help to love our neighbors.

But showing love to our neighbors does not mean ignoring their sin altogether or confirming them in their sin. One of the most-quoted Bible passages in our day is: *"Judge not."* Another version of this is the statement: *"Only God can judge me."* These phrases are usually brought out when a person does not want to be questioned for his behavior or lifestyle choices. So what can you say when someone throws your words of caution or warning back in your face?

Let's say that you find out your co-worker has been stealing from your employer. You call him on it, and he responds, "Who do you think you are? Are you so perfect? I thought Jesus said not to judge other people!" What do you say? Maybe his point sounds valid, and you let the issue go. But how is that loving to your co-worker, much less to your employer? A good way forward is to accept what your co-worker says without approving of the sin. You could say, "You're right. I'm not perfect, far from it. I've sinned as much as anyone I know. But that does not mean I have to go along with something that is wrong or act like it isn't happening."

If your neighbors think you are criticizing them because you believe you are so good, they will avoid you like the people avoiding the guy at the party with the log in his eye. But if they see your humble spirit and know that you care about them, they will be much more ready to listen to what you say. They might not accept your criticism right away. They might even be angry with you. But in time they hopefully will see that you said what you did out of love for them.

Our goal in warning and correcting others is not to elevate ourselves in their eyes, as though they should be more like us. Our goal is to point them to Jesus. Jesus is the one solution to our problem of self-righteousness and sin. If we think we are so good compared to others, we should try comparing ourselves to Jesus. Then we see that our righteousness is nothing. We have not come close to loving as He loved and sacrificing as He sacrificed.

Our righteousness compared to His is like the light of a match compared to the light of the sun. Our righteousness—if it is truly righteousness—can light up just a tiny corner of this dark world. The light of His righteousness fills the earth and the heavens. His holy life under the law was so pure, so flawless, that it was able to cover over the unrighteousness of all sinners.

This perfect holiness was placed upon you when you were baptized, and it continues to cover you now. What good is it to keep a tally of your own good deeds or compare your life with others when Jesus' righteousness is yours? We would rather lose all glory and honor in the world, all recognition and fame, than to lose Jesus' righteousness. He is our perfection that the law demands. He is the fulfillment of all righteousness for us.

He is also the atonement for our sins. We have not always been merciful and forgiving and generous. We have not always been humble in our dealings with others. We have not always perceived the log in our own eye. But Jesus, with clear vision and perfect focus, walked the way of the cross for us.

He had no log in His eye, but He did have one on His back as He made His way to Golgotha. He was nailed to that log—the cross with all our transgressions—and He died for the sins of all, for the self-righteous, the prideful, and the unrepentant. By the shedding of His blood, Jesus atoned for every single one of your sins and mine. God the Father poured out the full measure

of His wrath on His Son, so that the good measure of His grace and forgiveness would be “pressed down, shaken together, running over” and “put into [our] lap.”

We need this forgiveness every day because we continue to sin against our neighbors. We sin against them by hoping for their harm and failing to offer them our help. There is something in our eye, just as there is something in every sinner’s eye. But the Lord’s absolution, His free forgiveness, removes the logs and specks from our eyes. His grace clears up our vision, so that we see Jesus and everything He did to save us.

Seeing Jesus more clearly also helps us to see our neighbors more clearly. Our neighbors need mercy like we need mercy. They need forgiveness like we need forgiveness. They need help like we need help. And the Lord is eager to give these blessings to everyone. He blesses them through our efforts, and He often causes those blessings to return to us in good measure.

Jesus’ command to love our neighbor more and better than we have is hard for us to hear. It is painful to have the logs of self-righteousness removed from our eye. But He does this so that we look away from ourselves and any good things we might do and look toward Him. In Him we will always find righteousness, salvation, and the strength to live for His glory.

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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