

The Fourth Sunday after Trinity

St. Luke 6:36-42: "Does the Teacher Have Your Attention?"

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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. (*Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary*, 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 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. (Joh. 17:17)

In Christ Jesus, who calls us to ignore the distractions of the world and listen to His careful instruction and His comforting message of grace, dear fellow redeemed:

Teachers have a lot of authority. We give them our children and ask them to help our children become well-rounded and productive members of society. Some teachers do a better job than others. We can all think of teachers who were not very qualified for that role. Maybe they had the intelligence but not the ability to convey it, or they had some ability but no depth of knowledge. Or maybe they were lazy, or they behaved inappropriately.

On the other hand, we can think of teachers we appreciated back then and still do. Maybe they expected a lot from us, but they gave us the tools to do better and do more. They helped open up subjects and topics that we never thought would interest us. They helped us understand the

past and the present, so we had a clearer view of the future. We regret now that we didn't listen to them more carefully. We would go back to their classroom if we could.

But even the best teachers may not get through to all their students. Some students are unwilling to pay attention, unwilling to learn. This happened in the case of Jesus and those who heard His teaching. We are used to Jesus being called "Savior" or "Lord," but another common title for Him is "Teacher." Jesus was regularly called "Teacher" by His own followers (Mar. 4:38, 9:38, 13:1) and by those who opposed Him (Luk. 10:25, 11:45, 20:21), and He even applied the title to Himself (Luk. 22:11, Joh. 13:13-14).

His teaching was always interesting and always true. But it was not always listened to. Some students think they know more than their teachers—they think they have nothing to learn. Some students think they know better than their teachers—they think their teachers are ignorant or misinformed. Even when these things are true, God tells us in the Fourth Commandment to be respectful toward our teachers as those who are in authority over us.

The scribes and Pharisees did not respect Jesus. They could not find any flaws in His character, but they identified numerous flaws in His teaching. He described a heavenly kingdom whose inhabitants were there by faith. The scribes and Pharisees believed that eternal life in God's kingdom could only be obtained through each person's works. They had departed from the teaching of the Scriptures. They were in error, but they blamed Jesus.

Blaming Jesus was easier than facing their own flaws, their own sins. Jesus was not teaching falsely; they just didn't want to admit that He was right. None of us likes to admit when we are wrong. None of us likes to have our words or actions challenged. When we are accused, we are quick to fling accusations back at our opponent: "Who are you to judge me?! You've done much worse! Remember when you did this and said this and this and this?!"

This finger pointing is not very impressive. You see politicians do it and professional athletes and almost everyone else in the public eye. Mud-slinging doesn't make anyone look better. It just makes everyone dirtier. Our Teacher Jesus urges a different approach: "*Be merciful,*" He says, "*judge not... condemn not... forgive... give.*" He didn't borrow a page from His opponents' playbook. He used God's playbook.

We should be merciful toward others, He says, because God the Father is merciful toward us. We see a picture of His mercy in the parable of the prodigal son. The disrespectful, immoral son wasted his father's inheritance, and yet his father still welcomed him home with open arms (Luk. 15:11-24). The Father likewise welcomes us with open arms even though we have sinned against Him and squandered His gifts. He wants us to extend the same kind of mercy to people who have wronged us.

"*Judge not... condemn not*"—even those who are not Jesus' disciples love to cite these words. They think it means we should never criticize the choices that others make or warn them about their sin. If that were true, then Jesus would have contradicted Himself when He said, "*Beware of false prophets,*" who will be recognized "*by their fruits*" (Mat. 7:15-16). This obviously means to make a judgment about how someone teaches and lives.

When Jesus says “*judge not... condemn not,*” He is telling us first to take a hard look at ourselves. We should not in our self-righteousness be quick to judge others while at the same time minimizing our own sins. That’s like trying to get a speck out of someone’s eye when a log is sticking out of our own. If we are going to be in a position to correct others, which it is proper for us to do, we must first be willing to take correction ourselves.

“*[F]orgive, and you will be forgiven,*” said Jesus; “*give, and it will be given to you.*” These are the things that Jesus expects of His disciples – a merciful heart like the mercy of God the Father, and a humble and forgiving spirit like Jesus displayed. He endured great injustices from His enemies and was afflicted by them with great pain. Still He prayed to His Father, “*Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do*” (Luk. 23:34).

How does Jesus’ teaching of humility, forgiveness, and sacrifice sound to you? Much different than “survival of the fittest,” or “what goes around comes around,” or “do what feels right in your heart.” His teaching here is supremely challenging. It exposes our failure to be what God has created us to be and called us to be. We are supposed to be like our Teacher. Isn’t that the goal that every student has of a favorite teacher?

But we are not exactly like Jesus. We are not merciful like He is merciful. We are not patient and kind like He is. We do not forgive and give like He does. He is perfect, and we are not. And yet He still desires to teach us. He hasn’t kicked us out of His classroom. He continues to invite us to listen to Him and learn from Him. “*Come to me,*” He says. “*Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls*” (Mat. 11:28,29).

Even though we haven’t been the best students, even though we have often failed to take His words to heart, Jesus still speaks gently to us. He speaks to us in the way He wants us to speak to others. He deals mercifully with us when we really deserve His wrath. He does not judge us and condemn us to hell even though we have broken the holy law. He forgives all our sins which are more than we could ever number. He gives us His eternal riches in such full measure that we overflow with His blessings.

This is what Jesus teaches in the saving Gospel. **Does the Teacher Have Your Attention?** Or do you think you have already learned everything there is to learn from Him? Have you gotten bored hearing about the love that God has for you and the work that Jesus did to save you? Maybe you think it is enough to simply know the facts of the Bible, and once you know them, you don’t need to hear them again and again.

But the Gospel message of what Jesus has done for us is not simply factual, it is also powerful. St. Paul writes that the Gospel “*is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes*” (Rom. 1:16). Through the Gospel of Jesus’ death and resurrection, we are brought more and more in line with His holy life. The Gospel moves us. It changes us. It shapes us students so that we become more and more like our Teacher.

Jesus said, “*A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher.*” We are not above Jesus and never could be. We will always be His disciples. But through His Word, He trains us to be more and do more in His name. By teaching us the mercy that God the Father has toward us, He moves us to “*be merciful*” to others. By reminding us how

He let Himself be judged and condemned in our place to save us, He leads us to suffer and to sacrifice ourselves for the benefit of our neighbor. By forgiving us all our sins and giving generously to us, He moves us to be kind and good to those who sin against us.

This training in righteousness through His Word continues throughout our life (2Ti. 3:16). There will never be a point in this life that we will say we are *“fully trained,”* that we are exactly *“like Jesus.”* But we can certainly grow and become more mature as disciples of Jesus. God the Holy Spirit through the message of Jesus’ grace and forgiveness refines us and shapes us to be like Jesus is. He sanctifies us through this Word. He takes what belongs to Jesus—His holiness, forgiveness, life—and He brings it to us. As we listen to what our great Teacher and Savior has done for us, we learn and grow more and more into what He calls us to be and do.

Apart from Him, we wouldn’t understand mercy and humility and forgiveness. But through faith in Him, we see what He has done for us, and we trust what He is able to do through us. The power is not in us to accomplish the tasks that Jesus has set out for us. But the power is in His Word, in His teaching, and He imparts that power to us.

Through His Word, we are brought closer and closer to the culmination of our training when we will finally meet our Teacher face to face on the last day. Then no speck or log will impede our sight. No sin will trouble and divide us any longer. We will be *“fully trained”*—perfectly completed. Then, as St. Paul writes, we will *“be like him, because we shall see him as he is”* (1Jo. 3:2).

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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