

The 4th Sunday after Trinity
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Luke 6:36-42

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"Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful," our Lord tells us in today's Gospel.

These words call us to radical discipleship, because to be merciful even as your Father is merciful, is to show mercy even to your enemies.

This is not just a command to be nice to people who are easy to be nice to. It's about being merciful to people who hate you, who work against the things you work for, who repeatedly wrong you.

Jesus says:

Don't judge them.

Don't condemn them.

Forgive them... repeatedly.

Give to them... sacrificially.

This is what it means to "be merciful." And we will never understand this until we truly appreciate how God has dealt with us, with respect to our sins.

Yet we must start there! Plainly put: we sin, because we are by nature sinful. No excuses. No qualifications. No comparing with others. No shrugging it off. No making light of it, or ignoring the threatened punishment. None of that! We have sinned in thought, word, and deed.

Not only have we sinned, but we do sin, each and every day. All of us sin, repeatedly. And we sin because we are sinful. It's part of our fallen nature which is corrupted to the core. And so our sin is not only recurring, or even frequent. Rather it is constant. Our sinfulness is part of our identity. We can't get rid of it. We can't excuse it. And, when it comes to God's righteous judgment over sin, it matters not one bit whether we are perceived to be generally nice people. We are still sinners. And the consequences of that are deadly serious because God's righteous judgment of us and our sin is that we deserve to die.

We've got to let that soak in before any of today's Gospel will make sense! Even if you or others judge you to be a fine, upstanding Christian, you've still got to let this soak in, because the danger of judgment is out there, threatening throughout your entire life. And the moment we rely on ourselves to deal with the situation, we are dead. Judged. Condemned to hell and everlasting suffering, with the impossibility of being admitted back into God's presence.

But God has let you go!... purely because of His grace and mercy!

Yet His mercy is not merely arbitrary. It's not: "I'll let you go just because I feel like it today." His mercy toward you doesn't mean that there was no price to pay. Rather, God the Father has shifted the just punishment that you deserve onto His own dear Son, Jesus Christ. Not just your punishment, but mine too. And not just yours and mine, but the punishment that every single

human being deserves—past, present and future. He has placed it on His Son Jesus Christ who suffered the fire of God’s righteous wrath over sin in our place. That’s how “*your Father is merciful.*” On the most profound level, mercy is receiving the forgiveness of sins, and the guarantee of everlasting life with God in heaven, together all that we need to support our bodies and lives, even though we don’t deserve any of it, but in fact deserve just the opposite. Yet God calls us “*sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the ungrateful and the evil*” (Luke 6:35).

And now He tells you to reflect His mercy in your own actions, as you deal with the sins and shortcomings of others: “*Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.*” Every time you think a thought, every time you open your mouth to speak, temper what you think, say, and do with the knowledge that God your heavenly Father has shown you mercy. And He commands you, in turn, to show mercy to others.

You and I have no right to “Lord it over” our neighbor. We, who deserve to have God throw the book at us, but have been set free by His pure grace, have no right to throw the book at the one who sins against us. We have no right to withhold forgiveness, no right to treat them harshly, no right to leave them dangling over the fire by a thread. In fact, we have God’s serious warning that on Judgment Day, he will judge us as we have judged others:

“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...

For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you” (vv. 37-38).

Failing to show mercy when God has shown us mercy,
Judging others, when God has transferred our judgment to Christ,
Condemning others, when the Father has condemned His own Son in our place,
Refusing to forgive—even our enemies—when we have been forgiven,
Failing to give to those in need, when we have been given so much,
...each of these things is like the absurd picture of pointing out a tiny speck in someone’s eye,
while barely being able to see past the huge log in our own eye.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, your Father in heaven has shown you mercy without measure. He has given you the highest privilege of calling Him Father, and adopting you as His child in Holy Baptism, where His only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ, invited you to stand in His place. Made one with Christ in Baptism, you now receive the blessing of the Father who says,

“You are My beloved son.”

For Christ’s sake, your heavenly Father holds nothing against you!

For Christ’s sake, He does not condemn you!

For Christ’s sake He forgives you. And He continues to give you sunshine and family, breath and heartbeat, happiness and hope, joy, home, livelihood, and far more than you and I need or deserve.

So now... As Christ has invited you to stand in His place, He bids you to invite your neighbor to stand in your place. Let your neighbor experience the love with which Christ loved you, and with

which you love yourself. As you believe in the mercy of your Heavenly Father, so bestow that same mercy upon those who have sinned against you.

“Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.”