

In the Name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ and may our Lord and Savior sanctify you in the truth, for His word is truth. Amen

Fourth Sunday after Trinity (2021)

Put Your Self-righteousness in Check

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“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;” (Luke 6:36–37, ESV)

In the Gospel Reading for today we find Jesus preaching His sermon on the Mount. The first portion of our reading for today is the end of our Lord’s discourse regarding *loving your enemies* and the beginning of his discourse on *not judging others*. When we give this some thought, we can see how well these two subjects go together. I mean, who are we going to be the angriest with, our friends or our enemies? Who are we going to judge the harshest, our friends or our enemies? I think the answer is obvious. Our corrupted human nature is naturally going to gravitate to anger and hatred towards those who we hate, who we detest, towards those who we feel are less than ourselves, unworthy of our love or friendship. But aren’t we glad that God does not feel that way about us?

Considering who we are in relationship to God, we’re certainly not His friend by birth. No, our natural state is to be a friend of the world. St. James reminds us of who we are, telling us we are friends of the world., He says, ***“Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.” (James 4:4, ESV)*** St. Paul calls us ***“the sons of disobedience.” (Eph. 2:2, ESV)*** Furthermore, St. Paul asserts that we are born dead in our trespasses and sins carrying out the passions of our flesh and the desire of our bodies and are by nature children of wrath. (Eph. 2:1). Jesus says that we are sons of this world, therefore, we are shrewder in dealing with our own kind than dealing with the sons of light (Luke 16:8) That is, those who are called to faith and have become children of God. Yet despite our antagonistic attitude towards God. Despite our sorry and pitiful condition, unworthy of His love and caring. Despite our unfriendly attitude and outright hatred, God loves us and has had mercy on us.

Oh, for sure, He could have lashed out and ended our life in the blink of an eye, yet He chose not to. He could have consigned us to a life of misery because of our animosity toward Him. He could have said, they’re not worth fooling with, they’re not worth saving. But He didn’t!

No, God did none of those things, to the contrary, He loved us even when we didn’t love Him. He did not give up on us and wish us harm and eternal damnation, instead He reached out with His grace and love and gave us His most precious possession, so we could be reconciled with Him. He sent His only begotten Son to bring peace between Himself and us. He did this in order to eradicate our animosity and hatred toward Him. He sent His beloved Son to suffer, in our place, the wrath of God that is so justifiably ours because of our willing alienation, our unloving attitude, and our contrary will. He sent Him to take our place, to suffer and die that we might have peace with God. St. Paul puts it best, ***“For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” (2 Corinthians 5:21, ESV)***

Reminding us of this great truth, our Lord Jesus says to us, ***“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;” (Luke 6:36–37, *ESV*) Sounds great but can we really do what our Lord Jesus exhorts us to do? Can we be merciful and forgiving? Not if we desire to live according to the world. Not if we desire to exercise the old, corrupted nature with which we are born.

Our natural inclination is to do the opposite of what our Lord Jesus says we ought to do in today’s Gospel Reading. It is much easier to be angry, to react violently, to hate, despise, and reject all efforts at reconciliation, because this is our natural way of living. Even after we are called to faith, baptized into the household of God, and confess that we believe in the forgiveness of sins in the name of Jesus, harnessing our anger, our pride, our spite, and our desire to lash out at those with whom we disagree is not simply hard to do, it is impossible to do if we rely solely on our own power. Baptism cleanses us of all sin, original sin, and the sins we have committed, but it does not take away our corrupted nature. It does not do away with our concupiscence, which continues to lead us into sin. So what we would not do, we do and what we would do, we don’t. Therefore, since we are unable to do what we ought, we must call upon another to help us. We must call upon the Lord to strengthen our faith by the indwelling Holy Spirit that we may lead the Baptized life, a life pleasing to God, a life of showing mercy and withholding judgment.

But how easy it is to hate. Hate justifies our anger. Hate makes us feel superior. It makes us feel good. Oh that so and so, they are not worth loving, they are not worth being friends with, they are so much less than me. I do not want to stoop to their level. Oh, I just can’t stand them!

How easy this is, succumbing to our natural ability to hate. Succumbing to our natural ability to feel superior. Truth is, we must feel superior, or we cannot justify our hate and our anger. Falling back on our self-righteousness, we find it easy to condemn those with whom we have disagreement.

Oh, but pastor, these people we are angry with, those we hate, they’re not trustworthy, they’re liars, slanderers, and sinners. They’re not as good as us. Listen and you will hear the kettle calling the pot black.

To be sure, there are people who get under our skin. But the question we must ask ourselves is are they any different than us. Upon careful deliberation of this question we all must answer, NO. They are just like us, sinners in need of forgiveness, sinners in need of mercy, sinners who only God can judge, not us.

Now to be certain, when Jesus says we are not to judge, His words are often misinterpreted and twisted, and deliberately taken out of context. To begin with, our Lord Jesus does not say, Judge Not! But pastor, if this is not what He is saying, then what is He saying?

Our Lord is not condemning all forms of judging. Think of it. Parents judge their children’s behavior. Civil authorities judge human behavior according to the laws of society, and Christians have the right to judge doctrine. A Christian cannot bear a false prophet. Our Lord Jesus tells us to ***“Beware of false prophets,”*** (Matt. 7:15, *ESV*). St. Paul says, ***“I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them. For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naive.”*** (Romans 16:17–18, *ESV*)

Thus, Jesus is not denying the ministers of His Church or civil authorities the right to judge. Nor is He denying Christians the right to judge what is true and what is false, what is right or wrong according to His Word. But when He says, ***“Be merciful”*** He is reminding us of what we

have received, mercy from His Father. Mercy for our many sins, our many transgressions. More importantly, He is reminding us that we received this mercy without merit.

There is nothing we have done to make God pour out His grace and mercy upon us. Unlike what some believe, Scripture does not tell us that we run to God. That there is something inherently good in us that leads us to seek God. To the contrary, Scripture tells us that we are inherently evil, children of wrath, followers of the devil (Eph. 2). As such there is no goodness in us that would make God love us. But He loves us none-the-less. Despite our sinfulness, our contrary and unfriendly ways, God still loves us. Moreover, He knows that if we continue to live lives contrary to His Word, we will wind up on the receiving end of His wrath. But He does not desire this. This is a work alien to His nature, for God is good and He desires to pour out His goodness upon all of His Creation, especially the crown of His creation, mankind. So, despite our animosity, our aloofness, our rejection of Him, He wills to reconcile with us, He wills to bring us into His Kingdom, to be sons and daughters of His. And His will be done.

To accomplish His will, He sent His only begotten Son into this world to become our servant. To take our place so that He would receive God's wrath and not us. He came to be the reconciling branch that would break down the barrier between God and ourselves. He came to make peace between God and us, to reconnect us to our heavenly Father. He came that we might become children of God, members of His divine family. The judgment that was rightly ours, our Lord Jesus took upon Himself.

His suffering and death upon the Altar of the Cross, as gory and horrible as it was, was our due punishment. His rejection by the Father while He hung upon the cross, was the rejection we deserved. His descent into hell, to claim victory over sin, death, and the devil, was a descent into what was our destiny had He not come and taken our place, absorbing the punishment we so richly deserved for our sins, our alienation from God, our haughty and contrary attitudes toward God and others, our self-righteousness before God and our fellow man. Should we be merciful? Should we not judge others? The obvious answer to these two questions is a great big YES.

How can we not be merciful to others when God has been so merciful to us? How can we judge others when God judged His Son in our place? We can't! So stop picking at your neighbors' faults, they're no different than yours. If you are a faultfinder, you're not showing mercy, you are judging while forgetting that in Christ Jesus, mercy met justice and mercy won.

So, ***“Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.”*** Forgive, seek reconciliation, and stop being so critical of your neighbor. ***“Judge not, and you will not be judged.”*** Do not judge your neighbor. If there is something contrary between you and your neighbor, don't quarrel or become violent, but with a quiet spirit, with courtesy, with meekness, and the gentleness of Christ admonish one another in wisdom and the peace of the Gospel, forgiving your neighbor as you have been forgiven in Christ Jesus. Ask yourself, how many times have I sinned and done what is contrary to God's will and He has forgiven me. More times than you want to admit. Therefore, *Put Your Self-righteousness in Check* and forgive your neighbor. Be merciful and do not judge. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

May the Peace of God which passeth all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.