

The Fourth Sunday after Trinity, A ✕ D 2009

Luke 6:36-42 Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful. ³⁷, "Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven; ³⁸ 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." ³⁹ He also told them a parable: "Can a blind man lead a blind man? Will they not both fall into a pit? ⁴⁰ A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher. ⁴¹ 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? ⁴² 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.

In the name of the Father and of the ✕ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

1 The worst compliment a preacher can receive is "Good sermon, pastor, they really needed to hear that." And by "that" the complimenter never means the Gospel. He means the Law. They really needed to hear that Law, pastor. Thanks for directing it their way. No, friend, the Law is for you. It's to crush you, to humble you, to bring you to despair of your inability to save yourself. The Law is to bring you to the point where you're ready to hear the Gospel. That's why the prayer before worship, which you'll find inside the front cover of the hymnal, and which you may pray every Sunday morning, says, "I humbly pray that you would open my heart to the preaching of Your Word so that I may repent of my sins, believe in Jesus Christ as my only Savior, and grow in grace and holiness."

2 Today's Gospel reading, from Jesus' sermon on the plain in Luke's account of the Gospel is such a sermon. It's not meant for them but for you. The world's favorite verse from the Bible to misquote may be "Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven." But Jesus' command to "judge not" is not a command for the other guy not to judge you. It's

not a license to sin. It's not anything except a command to you not to judge, not to condemn, not to withhold forgiveness. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. That is, if you refuse to forgive, God will refuse to forgive you. If you condemn others for their sins against you, God will condemn you with the same loveless measure. If you judge the sins of others against you as too heinous to be forgiven, God will use that standard of judgment against you. It's not a command for others to let your sins slide. It's a command for you to forgive as you have been forgiven, to be merciful as your Heavenly Father is merciful.

3 You know what mercy is because you're quite good at showing it to yourself. When you sin, you're quick to forgive and forget. When you offend others, you'll quite naturally assume you had the best intentions. When your heart pours out wickedness, you'll explain everything in the kindest way. Yes, you're quite good at being merciful toward the biggest sinner you know: yourself. But when it comes to the sins of others, your mercy runs dry. Suddenly, the sins you're so willing to excuse in yourself are heinous offenses when others commit them against you. In your own eyes, your sins are easy to justify, while the sins of others come as a shock to your pious sensibilities. Where with your own sins, you're willing to wipe the slate clean and move on, you choose to dwell on the sins of others, to replay the incidents in your mind, and to hold these offenses against them. Repent.

4 It has been this way nearly since the beginning. When God came looking in the Garden of Eden for the jewel of His creation—humanity—He found Adam hiding. When confronted with his sin, Adam tried to deflect the blame: The woman You gave to me, she gave to me, and I ate. Someone's responsible, but it's certainly not Adam; maybe

it's Eve, or maybe it's the Creator. Eve reacted the same way: The serpent led me astray; it's his fault, not mine. So it has been ever since. Your eyes are blind to your own sin while magnifying the sins of others.

5 What does it mean to be merciful? Consider Joseph. He had every right to exact revenge on his brothers. They hated him and demonstrated it by capturing him and selling him as a slave to foreign traders. He wound up in prison for refusing to sleep with another man's wife. Nothing went well for him until he interpreted Pharaoh's dreams and found himself second in command over all of Egypt. With all this newfound power and authority, he could have gathered his wretched brothers when they came to him to plead for food and had them all killed. It would have been fair. But fairness is not mercy. Joseph was instead merciful, forgiving his brothers and bringing them to live comfortably and safely in Egypt.

6 Consider David. King Saul's affections took a drastic turn when he learned David was to be the next king of Israel. He went from treating David like a son to hating him. He pursued him to kill him. He chased him throughout all of Israel, driving David from land and home, giving him constant fear for his life. Twice David had the opportunity to exact his revenge. The first time, while Saul relieved himself in the cave where David was hiding, David stealthily cut the corner of Saul's robe off. The second time, while Saul and his army slept, instead of pinning Saul to the ground with his own spear, David merely took his spear from him. Twice David had the opportunity to kill Saul and deliver himself from Saul's persecution. Twice he showed Saul mercy.

7 But neither Joseph nor David is the paragon of mercy Jesus exalts as the One like whom you should be merciful. Rather, be merciful as your Father is merciful. To

the race of humanity born with eyes blinded by logs, to people naturally hypocritical and self-righteous, to the unmerciful Pharisees of yesterday and today, to you, the Father of all mercy sent His Son. He is the new and greater Joseph, the One not merely to provide food and pardon for His brothers but to be for them the Bread of Life. He is the new and greater David, David's Son and David's Lord, who not only refused to deal Saul the fatal blow He deserved but who willingly gave His life into wicked hands. This is the Father's mercy, to send His Son to extract the log from each of your eyes, to take away your sins. He took the planks of your sins from your eyes and laid them across one another. To these, to your sins, Jesus Christ was nailed to die.

8 This is mercy. Mercy does not overlook sins, it forgives them. God is not like a rosy-cheeked grandfather who can see none of the wickedness his grandchildren do or who winks away sin as no big deal. Rather, He knows the seriousness of your sin. He knows your sin alienated you from Him. So instead of ignoring it or pretending it was no big deal, He sent His Son to remove your sin from you, so that, for the sake of Jesus, He might be merciful to you. This is real mercy.

9 This is the same mercy Jesus calls you to have for one another. Having been shown mercy, you are free from your sins, free from your reluctance to forgive as you have been forgiven. As both a means through which the Lord delivers this mercy and a means through which He enables you to be merciful, Jesus gives you Himself. He feeds you with His very Body and Blood, which forgive your sins and strengthen you to forgive those who have sinned against you. No one unwilling to forgive the sins of his neighbor is welcome at the Lord's table, but those who find it difficult to forgive are

heartily welcomed. Here is strength, not from within you but from outside yourself, to forgive, to withhold judgment and condemnation, to give as you have been given to.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria
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