

The Fourth Sunday after Trinity, A^BD 2010
Luke 6:36-42

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

1 Mercy is the opposite of karma, the opposite of justice. Karma declares that good people receive good things and bad people receive bad things. Justice is getting what's fair, what you deserve, what is rightfully yours. This is how the world thinks. It is also how you naturally think. We are people of the Law, supposing to be able to earn God's favor by the good we do. But this is a myopic, narrow view of the Law. God has not given you the Law and also given you the ability to keep it. The Law just exposes more and more sin, unveiling your hypocrisy and your pride, your vain self-worship. The Law is like a punch in the gut that brings you to your knees, where you may pray, "Lord, have mercy."

2 Mercy is what sets the one, true, Triune God apart from all imposters. No other god is merciful. No other religion is based on forgiveness. Allah will judge you based on your works, so will the non-Trinitarian gods of the Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Christian Scientists. To break out of the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth of Buddhism and Hinduism, you must be good enough; the cycle of reincarnation knows no mercy. Not so with the God of Holy Scripture, the God of the Old and New Testaments. Mercy is His defining characteristic. He does not treat you as you deserve, according to your sins. He treats you as His Son; He treats you as Jesus.

3 And He calls you to do the same to others. Be merciful as your Heavenly Father is merciful. He, the paragon of mercy, calls you to have His mercy toward those you encounter. "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."

4 You know what mercy is because you expect others to show it to you, insisting on your "rights." 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.

5 Mercy is God's defining characteristic; it should be the defining characteristic of those who have received His mercy, His Christians, as well. God's people should be known, even among the godless, for their mercy. Since helping with a sizeable power bill a couple weeks ago, hardly a day has gone by when I've not gotten a call for help with another power bill or some other pressing need. If that bothers you, repent. You haven't understood God's mercy toward you. That is how it should be. Those who have received mercy, who know real mercy, are those about whom those who need mercy should say, "They will help."

6 Mercy is risky, it runs the risk of being taken advantage of. The one whose sin you forgive may learn that he can do the same thing to you and expect the same result. The one who gets a handout from you will likely return for more. The one to whom you have had mercy may very well take advantage of your mercy. That's the risk with mercy, because it's the risk the Father takes on you by showing you mercy.

7 So repent of false mercy. Repent of refusing to love your enemies and pray for them. Repent of repaying evil with evil. Repent of judging those who sin against you. Repent of condemning the sins of others more than your own. Repent of withholding forgiveness. Repent of picking for specks of sin in the lives of others while trying to ignore the logs in your eyes that leave you blind. Ultimately, your eyes are too blind to see anyone but yourself.

8 But He who told the parable is He who came to remove the logs from your eyes. He pulled them from your eyes and hoisted them onto His back. And then He carried them on the walk from Jerusalem to Golgotha. You have no real logs in your eyes, but you have real sins, real sins that separated you from your Creator. You needed a real Savior to die a real death. So He did. He took the logs and the splinters and was nailed to the wood of the cross. That's real mercy. That's how your Heavenly Father is merciful. Instead of giving you what you deserved, He gave what you deserved to His Sinless Son. He repaid the evil of the world's sinfulness with the good of the cross. What the world intended for evil, God used for the greatest good: the salvation of all who have faith in the crucified Savior. While you were still enemies of God, the Son of God took on human flesh, was born, lived, and died to reconcile you to God. He stretched out His hands in love and mercy and allowed Himself to be nailed to the cross. That's real mercy, as real as mercy gets. It's mercy precisely because you don't deserve it.

9 When you feel unable to be merciful as you have been shown mercy, when you are unable to forgive as you have been forgiven, when you are incapable of giving as you have been given to, come to the Lord's Supper. Here He gives mercy freely. Here is freedom from your unmerciful heart. Here you are given mercy anew and taught what it means to show mercy. Here Jesus gives you Himself and enables you to give of yourself to others. Here your sins are forgiven and you are set free to forgive others fully and freely. Here is mercy, not karma, forgiveness, not justice. Here is Jesus, with the Father's mercy for you.

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

Soli Deo Gloria
Pastor Jeff Hemmer