

“As Your Father in Heaven is Merciful”

Sermon, July 14, 2019, Immanuel Lutheran Church

“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.” (St. Luke 6: 36-42)

The first verse of this text from the Gospel of Saint Luke reads, “Be merciful, even as your Father in Heaven is merciful.” This little sentence contains both Law and Gospel. It tells us to do something--the Law: “**Be** merciful”. And it shows us the grace of God--the Gospel: “As your Father in Heaven is merciful.” This verse does not say that we will be saved by our works. It does not say “Be merciful, **so** that your Father in heaven will be merciful to you.” It says, “Be merciful, **as** your Father in heaven is merciful.” Be merciful, for your Father in Heaven has **already** shown you mercy. He has seen your sins and has still forgiven you because He loves you and does not want you to perish, but live. That is why He sent His only Son to take on human flesh, to fulfill the law that our sinful flesh chafes at, rejects, and breaks. That is why He sent His Son, the sinless One, to die for us, the sinful ones, so that by faith we would receive the forgiveness which He won for us on the cross. That is why He raised His Son from the dead, to show the world what His mercy looks like for us: eternal life in a glorious body reunited with an eternal soul, living in His Kingdom forever. God’s mercy endures forever. His Son--Mercy in the flesh--endures forever. And we, who have put on His Son by faith, live and endure in His mercy forever.

God has done everything for our salvation. We do nothing but receive it from Him in faith. We do nothing, but God has not left us with nothing to do in this life. He has given us plenty to do. He has called us to various vocations: father, mother, son, daughter, worker, citizen. He has given us His Ten Commandments to show us His will for our lives. He has written His Law on the hearts of all humans, on their consciences, so that we would not completely tear each other apart. He has established authorities in the civil realm: parents, teachers, to guide and protect us. He has established authorities in the spiritual realm also, pastors, who teach and preach and administer the

sacraments not on their own authority, but the authority which He has given them in His Word and their calling by the Holy Spirit through the means of congregations. Pastors are to correct, admonish, rebuke, encourage, protect, and comfort their flock.

And He has given all Christians something special to do. We are to be merciful, as He is merciful. Everyone who knows and feel in their hearts the great depth of God's mercy toward them wants to please Him and thank Him and look for a way to do this. God has shown them a way, not only a way to thank Him for all His many blessings, but a way to work with Him in this world by showing His mercy to others. In this way, we become, as Luther says, "masks of God". God works through our acts of mercy and forgiveness to show His mercy to others.

What do these acts of mercy look like? Jesus shows us in His sermon on the plain, earlier in this sixth chapter of Luke. There, Jesus gathers the apostles and other disciples around Him and tells them:

"Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. To one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from one who takes away your cloak do not withhold your tunic either. Give to everyone who begs from you, and from one who takes away your goods do not demand them back. And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them." (Luke 6: 27-31, ESV)

Is this what being merciful, as your Father in Heaven is merciful looks like? Yes, it is. But who can do this? Who can live up to these demands? Certainly not you nor I, by our own power, for we have inherited selfishness, and irresponsibility, and total autonomy from our first parents, which tell us to look out for number one, that says, "Don't get mad, get even.", that tells us never to submit to anyone voluntarily. We can't overcome this selfishness, this irresponsibility, and desire for total autonomy by ourselves. It's simply not possible. But with God, it is possible. Everything is possible. It is possible for Him to turn a heart of stone into a heart of flesh. It is possible for Him to turn lazy, irresponsible persons into hard-working, responsible contributors to their own lives, the lives of their families, and the lives of those around them. It is possible for Him to turn a selfish heart into a giving and forgiving heart. He does it through the Word of Law that breaks open our stony hearts. He does it with His Word of Gospel, which gives us a new heart, a clean heart, a new, right spirit, the Holy Spirit of God, Himself.

With the gift of the Holy Spirit, given to you in your Baptism, God has sealed your adoption into his family, and all that goes with that adoption: salvation, forgiveness of sins, eternal life. The Holy Spirit that now lives in you and in all believers is there to guide you into the paths of righteousness and compassion, to strengthen you in your faith, to mold you into gentler, giving and forgiving human beings. You can see the Holy

Spirit working in you every time you forgive someone who has wronged you, sinned against you, every time you speak the peace of the Lord to them from your heart. On the other hand, if you cannot or will not forgive others, if you put yourself in the place of God and judge their hearts, you may rightly question if you still have the Holy Spirit dwelling in you. If you will not pray for your enemies, you should wonder whether you still have faith.

So, what are we supposed to do when we catch ourselves being unmerciful in thought, word, or deed? We simply repent. We look honestly at our lack of mercy, and feel sorrow, sadness, for our coldness of heart. And we honestly ask ourselves whether we want to do better in the future. If we do, we should confess our sins and ask God's forgiveness, believing firmly that for Christ's sake, He will forgive us. We pray that that God give His Holy Spirit to strengthen us in faith and make us merciful children. We can pray this prayer with all confidence and boldness that God will grant it, because God has promised to do just this in our baptisms.. And whatever God promises, He delivers to those who trust in His promises. He **will** make you and me kinder, more merciful, because He has promised to conform us to the image of His Son, the kind and merciful. He will daily fill our laps with the blessings of kindness, so that it may then overflow to others through our kind words, thoughts, and deeds.

The Holy Spirit will show us how to speak the Word of His Law to our brothers and sisters with love, coming from a heart that sees our own weakness

That is what it means to see and take out the log in our own eye first, before we point out the speck in our brother's eye. Until we can recognize our own sin, we cannot lovingly point out our brother's or sister's waywardness. And we **are** called to rebuke sin. The pastor has the public office of doing this. He doesn't rebuke sin based on his own authority or holiness, however, but on Christ's. Neither does he pronounce the forgiveness of sins by His own authority, either, but in the place and the stead, and by the command of his Lord, Jesus Christ. If he pronounces judgment in the performance of his office, he pronounces God's judgment on sin. If he pronounces absolution in his calling, it is Christ who absolves.

Ultimately, every Christian, no matter his or her vocation, including the pastor, has the command to be merciful, to speak God's Word in love, whether it be the Law or the Gospel.

For God displays His mercy to us every day. He daily and richly forgives sin in His Church. Our Father in Heaven is merciful. And to proclaim His mercy, the Gospel, He has given us His Word and Sacraments in His Church so that we may learn to trust in His mercy, and in that trust, to be merciful to His other children, our brothers and sisters in the faith, and to our neighbor who does not yet know the mercy of God in Jesus Christ. Show us the log in our eyes and remove it, O Lord, so that we may clearly see your mercy to us, and share that with the world through our merciful acts. In Jesus' name. Amen. And now, may the peace of God which surpasses understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

