

Sermon #1,273: Luke 6:36-42 (Historic Gospel)
7-9-17 (Trinity 4), Bethany-Princeton MN

SHOW YOUR FAITH

Prayer: O Lord God, heavenly Father: You are merciful, and through Christ promised us that You will neither judge nor condemn us, but graciously forgive us all our sins, and abundantly provide for all our wants of body and soul: Establish in our hearts a confident faith in Your mercy, and teach us also to be merciful to our neighbor, that we may not judge or condemn others, but willingly forgive all, and, judging only ourselves, lead blessed lives in Your fear; through Your dear Son Jesus Christ, our Lord, Amen. (*Veit Dietrich Collect for the Trinity 4 Gospel*)

Sermon Text, Luke 6:36-42 (v. 36-37). ³⁶ **“Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful. ³⁷ Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.”** Lord, this is Your Word and these are Your Words. Sanctify us by the truth. Your Word is truth. By Your word of truth, Lord, lead us on the way of truth so that we speak the truth in love. Amen.

Dear fellow redeemed in Christ, who teaches us what mercy is by giving it to us all the time:

Mercy is one of those church words that’s been taken into the culture at large and subsequently misunderstood by everybody. Jesus uses it here – **“Be merciful,”** He says – expecting to be understood.

But now – or at least when I was a kid – boys would play “Mercy” or “Uncle,” squeezing each other’s hand or wrist hard until someone calls out for mercy. So mercy is seen as something you beg for when someone is dominating you, and when they give it to you they have some satisfaction that now in some way they have something over you and you owe them. This is exactly why people don’t want to be given mercy. You try to avoid that fate, you don’t want to be beneath someone that way.

But Jesus says, **“as your heavenly Father is merciful.”** That’s right, the whole concept of mercy originates with God. The world’s distasteful view of mercy is not consistent with God’s nature. Mercy isn’t giving so you can say: “Now you owe me.” Mercy is not wanting to be paid back.

That's what God is like. His mercy is His kindness. Sometimes we equate mercy with forgiveness. They are somewhat similar; forgiveness (grace) is God's undeserved love, and mercy too is undeserved. But God's mercy is more than forgiveness. It is really the extension of His forgiveness. Because He forgives your sins, He will also give you every good thing.

We learn this in the catechism, in the Lord's Prayer: Luther says that when we pray "Forgive us our trespasses," we are really asking God not to look at our sins, since because of our sins He would have to deny our every prayer; but instead we are asking Him to look at Christ on our behalf - Christ for us - and then He will "give us everything by grace."

This is what mercy is: that everything in life is a gift from God. Just as the forgiveness of our sins is the first and greatest gift, so everything God gives us every day - our spouse, our marriage, our children, our parents, our home, our very breath, the use of our brain and ability to learn even at older ages, feeling and dexterity in our hands, the ability to walk and run, our food and drink, our friends, safe streets, a country of laws and freedom, our school, even road construction - it's all a gift. We don't deserve any of it. What we deserve because of our sins is nothing good. So these are signs of God's mercy, but the source of it is God's forgiveness.

We look to the cross to see God's love for us. Then daily He also gives us many mercies in the things we tend to worry about. *"He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all shall with Him also freely give us all things. ... Seek first God's righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things" (Ro 8:32, Mt 6:32-33).* This is the picture of a loving Father. That is what Jesus says here: **"as your Father is merciful."**

I hope we can see that mercy is not just one aspect of the Christian religion. It is the religion! It is God's nature and essence. When I say that "mercy is the religion," the worldly response is to say that what's wrong with the Christian religion is that Christians don't do enough mercy. That is how we often hear these words of Jesus. But you have to go one step back. The problem with Christianity is that Christians don't know God as merciful well enough - which is the source of the mercy we show. "Have mercy!" directs us what to do, but it is first a prayer we say to God: "Have mercy!" We sing it: *Kyrie eleison!* - *"O Lord, have mercy!"*

When we spend time looking at what the mercy of God is, it teaches us what our mercy is supposed to be. You look at your failures to show mercy, and you tend to think that what you have is a love problem. But what Jesus reveals is that it is actually a faith problem. Our failures to show mercy, and our sinful judging, is a failure to show our faith. I think the key here is not that we have the right faith and just don't live it enough, but the problem is: we need a refresher on the faith!

The mercy of God is not a two-way deal that you make with Him. That is what Martin Luther thought when he was a young man, found himself in an awful storm, and quickly prayed: *"Help me St. Anne, and I will be a monk!"* He promised to do something in return for being protected.

We can think we are above this sort of thing. But even if we would pray to God instead of the idolatrous act of praying to a saint, how often do we perform a different idolatry of thinking that our good works are paying back God? – *God has mercy to me, He's done so much for me, now it's my job to do good things for Him.* This is worshipping our good works.

Instead we believe, teach, and confess that our good works are simply showing our faith. Nobody can see the faith you have which is on the inside. They can only see what's on the outside. Your works of love on the outside show the faith you have on the inside. People can see you go to church, that you confess your sins and say "I believe" in the creed. Did you know these are acts of love? You're encouraging others (starting with your spouse and children) when you do this.

But the danger in all good works is that you can turn showing your faith into showing off. We don't do these things to show off what good Christians we are. The way it's put in our hymn today says it so well: *"Works serve thy neighbor and make known the faith that lives within thee."*

This sounds so easy. Even what Jesus says here sounds easy and nice: **"Be merciful ... Judge not ... Condemn not ... Forgive ... Give."** But that's because we're picturing people to whom we want to be merciful, forgiving, and generous. We know in reality it's hard. That's why Jesus has to teach about it. The devil is present wherever Christians are and will put no lack of difficulties and obstacles in the way.

When Jesus says, “**Condemn not,**” and “**Forgive,**” it’s to someone who is *guilty* of something, even of something against us. Jesus is requiring us to be patient with people who *aren’t* good to us. It’s someone who has a “**speck in [his] eye,**” something to be blamed for.

I’m sure you can think of people in your life who are hard to love, hard to be patient with, whom you have real grievances with. You can make a good case for your complaints against them. They are in the wrong. You are in the right. Your bitterness, your resentment, your thoughts of retaliating or getting them back in some way, even by just ignoring them or not speaking to them, are justified, you think to yourself. Just look what they’ve done to you. They have provoked you to wrath. But there you are with sinful anger, and so must you answer to God as well. Look at what Jesus says! The terrible wrong they’ve done – that is only a “**speck in [his] eye.**” But this vengeful, spiteful, wrathful, resentful spirit that now fills you is a “**plank in your own eye.**”

See how the devil gets in the way and ruins our mercy efforts! What can we do? How can we be the people, the Christians, the Church we should be? Won’t God take His mercy away from such unmerciful people?

How can we show our faith?

The way He has given us is not to draw upon our own wellspring of mercy, which is limited and imperfect; but to draw upon His mercy, which is boundless and perfect and even more, His mercy has power to produce mercy in us. He bids us call upon Him: “O Lord, have mercy!”

You know where we do this? In the Lord’s Supper. It’s no accident Luther put this into his Lord’s Supper hymn, in the middle of each verse and at the end. The last verse ends with the mercy we give each other:

*And live in brethren here in love and union
Nor repent this blest communion!
O Lord, have mercy! ...
Give Thy Church, Lord, to see
Days of peace and unity: O Lord, have mercy!*

See, in the Lord’s Supper we kneel together, next to each other even, to receive the Lord’s forgiveness and mercy. He is being merciful to each

person. Each person is purified by Jesus' blood. Nothing blocks the way to God. He gives them everything in life by grace. If nothing stands between them and God, who are we to keep up walls between each other? Jesus clears the path between each other in His Church.

The Church looks like it should in the Lord's Supper, where there is only mercy. It strengthens us in this faith - knowing the Lord's mercy for us - and also strengthens us to show this faith and live it in fervent love for one another. Amen!