

07/05/20

Fourth Sunday after Holy Trinity

Be merciful, as Your Father is merciful

Luke 6: 36-42

“Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful.

Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.

Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you.”

And He spoke a parable to them, “Can the blind lead the blind? Will they not both fall into the ditch?

A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is perfectly trained will be like his teacher.

And why do you look at the speck in your brother’s eye, but do not perceive the plank in your own eye?

Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Brother, let me remove the speck that is in your eye,’ when you yourself do not see the plank that is in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck that is in your brother’s eye.”

Grace be unto you and peace, from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

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It is noteworthy that, for the first five Sundays after the Festival of the Holy Trinity, the appointed Gospels all come from St. Luke’s account of our Savior’s life—parables with which our Savior taught, the calling of the first disciples for next week, and in the case of today’s Gospel-text a selection from our Lord’s famous “Sermon on the Mount.” Luke has sometimes been called the “Evangelist for the outcast” because—in his Gospel and also in his record of St. Paul’s missionary work in the Book of Acts—he includes so many instances of Christ’s salvation coming to those in society who were weak, vulnerable, and despised by the people—the blind, the ceremonially unclean, hated tax-collectors, those whose sins were public knowledge. We could say that St. Luke is the Evangelist for poor Lazarus, for the lame and the sick and those from the highways and hedges who become the surprising guests at a feast, and for the lost sheep and lost coins whom our Savior specially seeks with His forgiving love.

It was natural enough that, in his account of Jesus' life, St. Luke should place such an emphasis on our Savior's ministry to outcasts—to the disadvantaged, to the marginalized. He was a physician by trade, and it was the sick and the lame and the injured with whom and for whom he himself worked every day. In his Gospel record of Christ's life, Luke is able to tell us of the Lord's Anointed who could offer real healing for body and soul to those whom Luke himself had tried to help. And as a companion of St. Paul who went with the apostle on his mission-journeys, Luke witnessed how the Gospel brought forgiveness and new life to the despised and the exploited and the rejected—gentiles, slaves, prisoners, those tormented by demons. It is perhaps only natural, therefore, that, in his Gospel, St. Luke should want to emphasize Jesus' saving love for those whom society rejected.

Mary's Son as the Lord's Anointed who has brought salvation for Jew and gentile alike; the blood of Christ Jesus which redeems the souls also of outcasts such as public sinners and tax-collectors; our incarnate Lord as the Good Shepherd who seeks out the one lost sheep and who sweeps the house to find the one lost coin—that is the precious emphasis in Luke's Gospel for which we give thanks, because the grace of God in Christ which is meant for tax-collectors and sinners is also meant for the likes of you and me.

I

In Jesus' "Sermon on the Mount" from which our Gospel-text for this fourth Sunday after Trinity is taken, our Lord presents to His people a description of the life which is to flow from our faith in Christ Jesus as our Savior. It is necessary to remind ourselves of this truth, because there have always been those who want to insist that our Lord's imperatives here—that we should love each other, that we should be merciful and forgiving—are the main message which Jesus came to preach. They are not. Our Lord, the evangelists tell us, travelled through Galilee and Judea "preaching the good news of the Kingdom of God." He told the people that He was the Lord's Anointed, the promised One who would bring salvation from sin and death. The parables in His sermons emphasized the grace of God—that undeserved and freely forgiving love for Christ's sake on which we must depend.

God's Son born of Mary had not come simply to be some kind of guru of moral living who instructs us about how we might earn our own way to heaven. He had come to give His life in payment for our sin—to shed His blood on the cross of Calvary to atone for our fallenness. He had come to smash forever the power of death over us by rising again on the third day. It is to His disciples—to us who put our trust in Him as our Redeemer and Lord—that He now gives these instructions about the life which springs

from our faith in Him—that life of love which reflects the inner life of the Holy Trinity, that heavenly life for which we were created.

II

“Be merciful,” says Jesus, “as your (heavenly) Father is merciful.” That term—“merciful”—is a specifically nuanced synonym for the divine love on which you and I depend. He shows grace to us—His free and undeserved love for us who are sinners and cannot merit His favor. And His “mercy” is His love for us insofar as we are weak, miserable, suffering and dying in this world which has been corrupted by our sin. To us who have received His forgiveness and who live with the sure hope of eternal life with Him, our Savior says, “Be merciful as Your Father is merciful.”

How desperately our world needs for Christ’s people to show to others the mercy we receive from our Savior-God—for us to be forgiving in the way that we are forgiven, for us to refrain from pompous and self-righteous judging, for us to be generous and giving. To think first of how we can help, of what we can contribute, of what we can do to make things better for others—that, our Lord reminds us, is to be like our Teacher. That is to walk in His footsteps and to show others what kind of a Savior we have. And already in seeking prayerfully to show His love and His mercy and His kind of forgiveness to others, we receive that good measure of which Jesus speaks—“pressed down, shaken together, and running over.” To follow our Savior’s example is already its own rich reward.

We know how difficult it is for weak sinners like you and me to live as our Savior commands us here. To notice the tiny mote in the eye of our neighbor while missing the huge plank stuck in our own eye—Jesus uses this humorous picture to show how ridiculous is that judgmental attitude which, as we know all too well, comes so naturally to us. We will need the help of our Lord Himself if we are to follow Him and reflect His love to others.

III

“Be merciful as your Father is merciful. Forgive. Give generously. Stop judging others.” We who have been baptized in the name of the Holy Trinity, St. Paul reminds us, are to die to sin every day. In repentance we lay at the foot of the cross on the hill Golgotha all the times we have selfishly withheld the merciful help we could have offered, all the times we chose to nurse a grudge rather than forgive, all our failures to give as we could, all the many times we nurtured petty judgments against others instead of seeking to rid ourselves of our own faults. And, as St. Paul also reminds us, we who have been baptized in the name of the Holy Trinity are to rise again every day through faith in Christ Jesus—rise to new life with Him, rise

to live as He teaches us to live. Receiving love from Him, we turn now to show His love to others. Drinking deeply from the cup of His forgiveness and His mercy and His giving, we turn to offer that cup to others.

It is our Savior Himself who gives us the best example of being merciful to the weak and vulnerable, of forgiving, of offering help instead of simply judging. Jesus healed the lame and the leprous. He fed the hungry. He sat with those whom others judged and ate with them, so that they could receive the salvation He had brought also for them. And now we—who hear His word of Absolution and who share in His sacred meal for the forgiveness of sins and who are thus given the sure hope of eternal life—we study Him in the Gospels. We observe His life of love. And, in repentance and faith and in heartfelt prayer, we set about our blessed task of showing our Savior's love to all those around us.

“Be merciful as your Father in heaven is merciful,” Jesus says. “Give generously.” We can choose a way of giving to those who have little, of helping those who are weak, of seeing to the needs of those who cannot take care of themselves. “Forgive,” says our Lord. Carrying His blood-bought pardon in our hearts, we can turn to that one who has hurt us and seek with our Lord's help to wipe the slate clean. “Do not judge,” He says. In repentance and faith, we can spend our energy trying prayerfully to remove the plank from our own eye rather than dwelling on the perceived faults of others. With our Savior's help, we can seek every day to follow His example.

May the Holy Spirit fill us with this life of faith and love for Jesus' sake.
Amen.