

Sermon Transcript for the Fourth Sunday after Trinity, June 27, 2021

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Okay, "Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful. Judge not, and you will not be judged." I think these are some of the most confusing words and misused words in Scripture that you could probably find. I don't know how many people have used these words, "Judge not, and you will not be judged," to basically say one of two things. One, "Well, I can't accuse anybody of sin, or I can't say anything is wrong in this world because I'm not supposed to judge. So yeah, do everything that you want to do, and we'll figure it out in the end. So I can't say whether what you're doing is wrong or not wrong or anything like that. I'm not going to judge anybody." That's one way that it is often used, which is why some of our church bodies have gone to the point of not even saying that sin is sin. They've approved of behavior that is wrong, that is clearly stated as sinful in the Scriptures. So that's not how we are to apply those words.

On the other hand, there's other people that take this, "Judge not, and you will not be judged," as a description for, if you can figure out how to live your life without judging anybody, then finally at the end, God will not judge you for your sin. So try harder and do better. All of you. That's not also how this word is meant to be used. But we do need to understand how it is that we can apply this properly. Because let's just be frank, "Judge not, lest you will be judged," if you look at the very end of it, you have Jesus saying, "You, hypocrite." Now, I don't know about you, but that sounds rather judging. There's got to be a difference between what is Jesus talking about, otherwise, He just contradicted Himself right here in this section of Scripture.

We begin with the first line, "Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful." Or maybe it's better to be said, "Be merciful because your Father is merciful." You see, this is a description of what God has done for us. God is merciful. He doesn't judge us according to our merit. He gives us His love and grace. He does not desire to judge. In theology class at seminary, the judgment of God is called His alien work. Alien as in, it's not His desire, it's not His nature, it's not His normal personality. His personality is not to judge. His nature is to love and to forgive. But if we fail to seek after that love or if we fail to receive that love, then He has to apply His alien work of judgment. But that's not what He desires. He desires to love all. And He desires everybody to know that they are not judged and they are not condemned because He has judged and condemned Christ in our place.

And so He can then show His natural personality and nature of love and forgiveness and grace because of Jesus Christ who took our place. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to you. Now, if we're honest with ourselves, this is the Law in its harshest form. The main thing that the Law of God does is show the mirror to us. And when we look in that mirror, what we see is our failure. You see, when we look in the mirror, we are supposed to see Jesus Christ. Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect. We're supposed to live up to the standard that God has set in place, which is perfection. So the ideal, if we could follow the Law, we would hold up the mirror of the Law, and we would look at it, and we would see Jesus Christ. But if we're honest with ourselves, we don't quite come up to His level. We are not as merciful as we ought to be. We do judge other people. How often do we say, "I can't believe that person. I can't believe they just said that. I can't believe they just texted that or wrote that or posted that on their Facebook, or I can't believe they just did that in the store."? We judge. We do. We're not supposed to, but we do. "Forgive, and you will be forgiven." Forgive us our trespasses as You have forgiven our trespasses." Okay, I hold grudges sometimes. I don't like people, and I don't want them to be forgiven sometimes because I'm... Well, because I'm wrong and I'm judgemental.

So when we look at this as this is God's demand of us, we fall short. We're like, "Okay, I'm done. I got nothing here." Which is exactly what the Law is supposed to do. It's supposed to drive us to our knees to declare that I am not worthy of the grace of God and the love of God. I deserve His judgment and His wrath. And yet, because God is merciful when I am not merciful, because God judges Christ and not me, because He does not condemn me but has condemned Christ, He has forgiven us, and He promises not only to give us the benefit of eternal life. Now, if we were just barely, "Okay, God, I know I get to get into heaven, but that's all I can expect or hope for." But what does God say?

Again, last week we talked about the prodigal father, the father that is wanting and wasteful, that gives more than we could possibly even use, or even imagine. He gives us more because He never considers it wanting or wasteful to give His grace and love to us. And so, here we have another description of that generosity of God, because He says, "Give, and it will be given to you." So what does God give us? He gives us a good measure. And as somebody described it, this is actually illegal. When you weigh something, you're supposed to just pour it in and weigh it out. But this, He grinds it in and pushes it down to make sure He can get more in there. And He pushes more in there, and He puts more in there until it's overflowing. Well, again, that's wanton and wasteful. That's not equal to what is deserved, it's much more abundant. It's overflowing with grace.

You hear Psalm 23, "My cup overfloweth." You have this concept that God gives beyond what we could possibly imagine. And then just to hammer it home, can a blind man lead a blind man? So if I'm sitting there judging you, basically God is describing me as a blind man. And I'm trying to lead you to be better because I'm in the same boat as you, and I'm not better than you. We can't lead each other. We cannot. In other words, when it says, "Judge not, and you will not be judged," the whole point of this is we do not get to stand in the place of God, as Joseph made very clear in the Old Testament.

Now, Joseph was a ruler, the second in command of Egypt. His brothers had indeed done extreme wrong to him, thrown him in a pit, sold him off into slavery, and let him go suffer whatever it was he was going to suffer. He got falsely accused of adultery. He got thrown into prison unjustly. And yet, God intended it for good. So the brothers being afraid that Joseph would take the power of the state and apply it to them, came up with a story. You can understand these brothers. I mean, okay, you've got the all-powerful Joseph. I mean, literally, except for Pharaoh, he's the ruler of the land, and he has control of the armies. If he wants to kill somebody, who's going to say differently? So you can understand the brothers going, "Okay, dad's dead. Joseph has probably been harboring a little bit of anger towards us for many, many, many years. It was probably only dad who prevented him from really bringing down the hammer. So we got to get this figured out, otherwise, we're in trouble. So Dad told us before he died that you should forgive us because we know we did wrong, but forgive us." I mean, they didn't really have a good answer except, "Please." Joseph understood. He could, by rights, have punished them, killed them. But he understood that he did not serve in the place of God because God used his sorrow and his suffering, predominantly for the good of Joseph and the good of his brothers, but for the good of an entire world. The famine that affected the nations didn't just affect Egypt and Israel, it affected the whole known world. And everybody from all over came to Egypt to receive grain because they were the only ones that had it. So God used it dramatically and amazingly for the benefit of the world.

And then we have Paul saying, "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us." In other words, we as Christians are to view suffering and challenges and heartache in this world very differently than those people who do not know the Word of God.

We are to consider all that happens to us, including the bad things and the hard things and the things that make us suffer, as being a blessing from God. A blessing? Yes. Because through our suffering, we get to be a blessing to those around us, because we are able to demonstrate the love of God in our lives and to them and in our situation. In other words, this is an opportunity for us to practice what we preach, that we trust in God above all things, that we believe that God is going to take care of us no matter what, that He is with us to the very end of the age.

Do we really mean He is with us in the middle of our cancer treatments? Do we really mean He is with us in the midst of the hurricane that wipes out the town? Do we really mean that we believe that He is with us when we lose our jobs? Do we honestly believe that God works all things together for good and that He gives us peace, that peace which surpasses all understanding and the joy of our salvation? Do we believe that? Or do we just think that that's only how we're supposed to act when things go well and right, according to our own ideas? This is not an easy thing to hear, but it is an important one because we know that our present sufferings are nothing compared to the glory that is revealed. We know that this is temporary and that nothing that we face here is worth losing our faith and our trust in God, because what we are going to receive is so much better, pressed down, shaken together, and running over.

We know that this world is broken. We know it is messed up. That's clear. There's no question there. But when we are in the midst of the chaos and the crippling and the heartache of this world, when we can stand in joy and peace, confident that God is working all things together for good, that is what Christ did. On the cross, what did he do? Did he say, "I can't believe you put those nails in my wrist. Seriously? You whipped me? I didn't do anything. That crown of thorns, man, that really hurt. I can't believe that you ripped out the hair in my beards. I'm remembering that for later."?

No, He doesn't do any of that. Instead, He says, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." We are called to act in grace and mercy towards one another so that the love of Christ might shine through us, even in the midst of our suffering, even in the midst of persecution. Now, all of that being said, we still haven't addressed the whole idea of judge not, lest you will not be judged, and where that all fits into this picture. We are called to be loving to one another. We are called to forgive. However, we are also called to speak the truth. And there is a difference between speaking the truth and judging. The truth is that some behavior is sinful, and we are called to declare it as such. That is not being judgmental. That is not judging. That is simply declaring the Word of God to be true.

God says that all sexual sin outside of the bonds of marriage are wrong, between one man and one woman. God says that all stealing is wrong, even the quarter versus the million dollars. God says that lying is wrong, bearing false witness, coveting. So to declare these things to be wrong and to stand firm and say that we support the pro-life agenda because we believe that it is murder, that is not being judgmental, that is declaring the Word of God to be true. When we say that marriage is between one man and one woman, that is not being judgmental, that is declaring the Word of God to be true. When we declare that we are to be honest in all things and that they are a liar, that is not judging, that is declaring the Word of God to be true. It is all for the purpose of bringing about repentance, bringing about a trust in the Word of God, a confidence that God will give us good things. But we need to know that, and we need to confess our sins so that we can receive and hear the grace that is freely given to us. It's there for all of us.

We also need to be ready to say, "Yes, what you have done is a sin. However, for the sake of Christ, you are forgiven." And so, we also need to be ready to welcome all sinners and tax collectors into our fellowship

because they are forgiven as are we in Christ. All who call upon the name of the Lord will be saved, not just the ones who look righteous and who seem to figure it out and do it right most of the time. But those of us who fall and falter and trip over ourselves and our sins multiple times every week and come back to the altar and confess every week, yes, even us, we will be saved in Christ. And we thank God for that comfort. So we don't have to judge. We can be merciful, we can rejoice, and we can forgive because Christ has forgiven us. And besides which, let's face it, there's enough to deal with in our own lives that we need to confess and try and figure out how to do right. We don't need to worry about everybody else. I mean, it's a full-time job trying to figure out how to take the stupid log out of my own eye. I don't need to worry about trying to figure out how to take the log out of your own eye. That's God's job. So I'm going to focus on myself in trying to get rid of the sin in my own life. And I'll let God work on you to help you take the log out of your own. And we will help those out there, trust that God will work with them, to take the speck out of their own eyes. So we live knowing that we are humbled before our Lord, that we are never greater than our Teacher. But we should be like our Teacher. And He forgave those that crucified Him. How can we do anything less?

May His grace and mercy and peace be and abide with you always, now and forever more, unto life everlasting. Amen.