

Fourth Sunday after Trinity, July 10, 2022

Readings: Genesis 50: 15-21; Romans 12:14-21; Luke 6:36-42

Christ's Mercy Is Ours to Show to Others

"Be merciful, even as your Father also is merciful" (Luke 6:36–42). The old Adam in us wants to condemn and seek vengeance. But the Lord says, *"Vengeance is Mine, I will repay"* (Rom. 12:14–21). To condemn, to avenge yourself, is to put yourself in the place of God. It is to fail to trust that He is just. Ultimately, it is to disbelieve that Jesus suffered the full vengeance for all wrongs. Only Christ is merciful as the Father is merciful. He is the one who overcame all evil with the good of His cross, forgiving even His executioners. Jesus is our Joseph, who comforts us with words of pardon and reconciliation (Gen. 50:15–21). He is the One who does not condemn but gives life that runs over. Only through faith in Christ are we sons of the Father—being merciful, forgiving, doing good to our enemies. For in Christ we know that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us (Rom. 8:8–13).

Sermon Transcript

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

So in Genesis, we have Joseph's father dying. So Israel dies. The man, the Israel dies, and this is Joseph. Remember he's the second in command of Egypt. There's Pharaoh and then there's Joseph. And Joseph was the one, of course who saved not just his own family, but Egypt and the entire region, because he was able to interpret the dream that told Pharaoh there's going to be seven good years and then seven famine years. And so Joseph was raised to this position of power and authority. And he treated his brothers well while his father was alive. But now his father's dead and the brothers are going, "You know, if I were Joseph, I'd be a little bit upset at me for having thrown him into a pit and sold him off to slavery. And he suffered all of these things for so many years. Now he's in position of power. Maybe now that my dad's dead, he's going to take it out on me." I mean, that's what they're thinking. So they come up, "You know what? Let's tell Joseph while dad was still alive, he told us once he's gone, that you should forgive us. Sure. I'm sure that's what he said. That's what he meant. You need to forgive us and be okay with us, just in case." And Joseph, I mean, let's face it, Joseph had every right to be upset at his brothers. He had the authority to punish his brothers, the ability to punish his brothers. So they were maybe perhaps in a worldly sense, justified in their fear.

And we have the world around us trying to deceive us, trying to beat us down, trying to tell us that we are the mean things, evil for us. I mean, there's an entire world out there now saying that good is evil. That Christianity is by nature evil, because we say these things are right and these things are wrong. And we got people out there to get us. How do we respond? How does Joseph respond? We may not have the power and authority of Joseph, but we still have the natural inclination to fight, to defend ourselves, to revenge ourselves against the wrong being done. I mean, I don't know if we'd have a movie industry in Hollywood if there wasn't the story of revenge for wrongs that needed to be righted. That is the way the world works. And I mean, I get thrilled by these movies and I get excited by them and I go, "Yeah, that's what we need to do."

And then I hear these passages and I'm going, "Well, as a Christian, maybe I need to rethink this a little." How does Joseph respond to his brothers? "You meant it for evil, but God used it for good. Who am I to stand in the

place of God?" We have this whole theme that "Vengeance is mine" says the Lord, "I will repay." If that is true, if we know that God will repay the evil in this world, we don't need to try and seek it out ourselves. Instead, we are called to bless those who persecute us. We are called to rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep, live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty or conceded. Do not repay evil for evil. I think with this phrase, we all need to just plain get off of Facebook, because it's all we're doing. And the only thing I can figure out that Facebook is about is trying to beat each other up with our truth. I'm more right than you are, so you need to listen to me. A couple of weeks ago or maybe last week we said, don't correct a scoffer because they will hate you. That's Facebook. Minus going to see your grandkids and being able to see what they're doing, that's the only thing Facebook seems to be about. We need to figure out how to speak the truth, but do it in a way that is pleasing to God.

As Jesus says here, "Be merciful as your father is merciful. Do not judge. Do not condemn or you will be condemned." Now a lot of Christians have taken this and saying, "Well, we can't say anything. We got to be silent in this secular sphere. We cannot say that homosexuality is wrong. We cannot say that marriage is one man and one woman. We can't say that abortion is murder. We can't do any of the-. We can't say anything. So we need to just be silent." Or on the opposite extreme, we just accept what the culture says and incorporate that into our teaching because we don't want to judge, we don't want to condemn.

So we are called however, to speak the truth. So it's different between quoting the Scriptures and saying what God says in the Word of God and being judgemental and critical. See it is important for us to speak up to the truth, to declare what God's Word says about sin and evil. But it's how we say it and the means by which we say it, that is most important. If we say it with a bigger stick than the other guy and we try and figure out whose got the biggest stick, nobody's going to listen.

When you get into an argument, most of the time, the argument is not about, "Let's hear your ideas and I'll share my ideas and we'll figure out which one has the best ideas." More likely it's, "My ideas are right. I'm not listening to you. I'm just forming my response to why you're wrong. And then I'm going to beat you up with it again." That's our normal human discussion. And so a lot of us just shy away and don't say anything. But that's not what Jesus says, means to say when he says, "Judge not or condemn not or take the log out of your own eye before you try and take the splinter out of your brother's." What He's saying is how we speak is just as important as what we speak. You can be absolutely right in what you are saying and absolutely wrong in the way that you are saying it, so that no one will actually hear the truth of your words. If we speak with haughty eyes, if we speak argumentatively, seeking to be in combat with each other about my ideas versus your ideas and one upping each other. If we tell everybody how foolish they are, because they don't understand the Word, we're going to get nowhere. We are to be like our Teacher. Was Jesus able to get His Word across? Absolutely. Did He say it in a way that people could hear? Absolutely. He said it gently. He said it peaceably. And yet, the Word got through. You see, when we start speaking as if we have all the answers and we are perfect and you should just follow our example and then your life will be wonderful, well then I'm putting all the emphasis upon me and then what are they going to do? They're going to look for the time when I screwed up and they're going to point that out and the rest of what I say is gone. So speak humbly and gently, to admit that I have a log in my eye. Yes. I mean, that's how we start out every worship service, every divine service, "I've sinned against You in thought, word, and deed." Or in the old language, "I, a poor, miserable sinner." See, this is not just what we should be speaking on Sunday morning, but every day of our life. Every conversation that we have should begin with the thought, "I am a poor, miserable sinner." And the only reason I know

anything about God's grace and the truth is because He has given it to me as a gift. And I want to share that gift as one sinner to another sinner. Here's what I have heard from the Word of God. I am no better than you or no worse than you. We're all sinners. But this is what God's Word has to say. This is what it means to judge not and you will not be judged. Condemn not and you will not be condemned. Are we called to speak the truth? Yes. But how we speak the truth is just as important. So we, even in the midst of times when we are being persecuted, wrongly persecuted, we're still called to live in harmony with one another, to not be haughty or conceited, but to repay evil with good. Raising the stakes, fighting harder, being louder does not solve the issue. Proclaiming the Word of God with peace, with humility and allowing the Word of God to wheedle its way through all the defenses of the anger and the fear and the resentment and the misunderstandings, to allow God's Word to weed its way through and plant itself in that person. Because you have not gotten in the way through your arrogance or your belligerence.

That is what we are called to do. Paul rejoiced that he was in chains for the sake of the Gospel. You see, Christ has overcome the world. As Joseph said, "You intended this for evil, but God used it for good, that people might be safe." In his case, from a famine. In our case, from death, eternal death. They might intend it for evil, but we already know that it all works out for good, for those that love Christ. Because He has done it for us.

If we then have eternal life, if we have the joy of our salvation, the peace which surpasses all understanding, if we have learned to be content with plenty or with little, then we don't need to raise our voice nor do we need to be afraid of those who persecute us. We can be thankful because even in this, we have joy. See, our circumstances do not create the joy and the peace. The joy and the peace are ours because of Christ in the midst, and maybe even in spite of the circumstances that we are in. We don't wait for joy. Joy is already there. Even when we are persecuted, even when we are being pushed down and accused wrongly. We don't need to avenge ourselves. We don't need to fight. We don't need to judge and condemn and try and ridicule the other person to keep ourselves safe. We already are safe in the Word of God. Come what may, life or death, persecution or famine, nakedness, nothing shall separate us from the love of God that is in Christ, Jesus. If we have that attitude, it's going to proclaim something extremely different to the world around us.

And that is how the Word will go forth and accomplish what He desires. And after all, that's what we're all about, isn't it? That God's Word might work in us and then through us, so that it might work in them and through them? If your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he is thirsty, give him something to drink. For by so doing, you will heap burning coals on his head. Now that's not to say, "Ha, I'm going to make him feel bad by being kind to him." You've kind of missed the point. No, you're kind to him and the burning coals are the conscience that accuses him, that he realizes he's the one that is wrong and wants to hear the message of the peace. The goal is to bring them from enemy into friend and brother, not make them feel bad. So we are kind. We give a drink. We feed the hungry, even if they're our enemies. Because Christ has fed us and nourished us with His own body and blood. While we were still enemies, He brought us into the family. He adopted us and made us His own. If God has done that, surely we can figure out how to be kind and loving to our brothers. He has done so much for us. Let us in the joy and the peace and the hope of our salvation, be kind and gentle and humble and loving to everyone that we come in contact with. Ignore Facebook and get into the real world, where you can actually talk to people and interact with them and find peace.

May His grace and mercy and peace be and abide with you always, now and forevermore, and in all conversations and interactions with others, unto life everlasting. Amen.

