

## Fourth Sunday after Trinity, Sunday, July 2, 2023

**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**

Let us pray. By Your grace, O Lord, You've called us to proclaim Your Word. My Grace, may Your words feed and nourish those who hunger and thirst for You. My Grace, may the words of my mouth reflect Your will, not mine, that I may have the mind of Christ as I speak that we may humble ourselves and become totally obedient to You. In Jesus' precious name. Amen.

Good morning. I'm glad to be here. My name is Pastor Dan Follmer. I am 65 years old as of a week or so ago. Does that mean I'm getting old? I remember thinking 40 was old, and now my gosh I'm 65. Somebody said to me outside as I'm greeting, they said, "You're just a baby." God is good. He is good.

You know, remember a few weeks ago the readings, while it was the First Sunday in Pentecost, the readings included about Peter and the Holy Spirit. It was that day that several thousand people came to know Christ. I want you to consider this, just the next few statements, consider it as we try to discover what it is that God would have us do. On that Pentecost day, what was the Holy Spirit's function that day? Was Peter a fantastic evangelist like Billy Graham? Or was he like you and me, and... Or was the Holy Spirit used the Apostles' words to come and touch those people? Or did the Holy Spirit reach out and touch them when those many thousands that were converted?

With that being said, I'm excited again to be here. Did I tell you that already? That's what happens when you get old. You start forgetting. That's why I write it down anymore so I don't. Did anybody notice me here last week? No, yes, no. You are a quiet bunch. I was here last week in your midst, hidden. I was a good Lutheran. I think I was in second to the last row, not the second one. I usually come a week before wherever I go and preach. The reason for that is a couple of things. It's to find out where they are in Scriptures and what they're talking about. But to listen to pastors' words and see if I can put a word that describes it. The word I came up with was "intentional". Intentional, if you look at today's Scripture readings, wow, my gosh, tell me intentional doesn't play a part in not only who we are, but it's what we say and what we do, because if we... I didn't bring the Scripture reading up here. I loved Bible Study this morning, listening into it, because it really talked about what we as Christians should do. Intentional or not.

I'd like to start with a little story because I'd like for you to get a picture of what I mean. About 20 years ago I was living here in Sarasota. The Bradenton Christian School asked me if I would come and do their devotion or their chapel for the day. I thought, okay. Sometimes, I have these ideas, and my wife just shakes her head, but I thought you know what, I'm going to dress up like a bum and I'm going to take Grandma's old quilt that's totally worn out to put around my shoulders, and I got there probably an hour early. In that, I stayed out of the way. I stayed back by their gym, laying against the wall. I listened or watched for comments or things that would happen. Even myself, I did not really truly understand what was going to happen. It started off with these boys who'd come by, "Oh, you don't belong here. Get out of here. Whoa, whoa, whoa." Not nice words. Then I sat there... I'm going to make the story a lot shorter because otherwise you won't get out of here until 1:00. They started throwing rocks at me, and I just took and held the quilt up over my head. Then the bell rang and they all went into their classes. What they do on Wednesday is they have chapel. They all go to their rooms to take rolls or do whatever they do, and then they all file over to the chapel. What I did is I went over to the chapel, right where the door went up into it. I laid against the wall, and I sat there. A lot of the kids were opening their eyes and were going, "Oh, what are you doing here? You don't belong here. Get out of here." Some other choice words. That happened. Then here's the point, when chapel started I walked in from the back and I walked up to the front and I turned around, and I said, "Why? Why..." I'm trying to say the nice part. "Why did you guys reject me? And the words that were said. Then you hit me with a stick, and you started throwing rocks at me and stuff. I want to know who that was." To show how stupid kids are, these three boys in the back raised their hand. The problem was this, one of the boys were the principal's son. The other two boys were teachers' sons. Where do we go with this? Oh, before I finally came in, there's this little black girl that came up to me and she said, "Sir, can I give you my lunch?" Well, the whole point of this, was that intentional or not? When we do things, intentional or not? We can every one of us sit here and say, "Well, we're not there. We wouldn't have acted that way there."

But here's the confession sin, the second part of the example was this. It wasn't too long after that that I went up to St. Petersburg where the LWML was having their regional group. I did the same thing there. I went out and I sat, and boy it really bothered some of the people that were there. One of them went and called the police because they wanted me removed. Luckily, the police didn't get there until the church service had started, and I was in the back. I could see them out there, and it was like oh, gosh, I'm in trouble. It finally came time for the sermon, and I got up and I walked up there. There, I got some of the meanest looks. I took my quilt from around me and laid it down. I unbuttoned my shirt and I took it off. Well guess what I had underneath it? My black shirt with a clerical. The looks on their face was incredible.

The point is this, what we do, is it intentional? Did they intentionally do that to me? No, we're not getting into that. That's a whole other sermon or two. But it kind of gives us a picture of what intentional is. All right, I've got one more thing here that I need to bring into the picture, and then we'll look at it from there. Hebrews 4:12, what's that one about? God's Word is living and active. Wow. God's Word is living and active. This is a Bible that I've had for years, and years, and years. My wife was using it in Sunday School. I'd like her to use her own. Don't use mine. But she did. I stood back there and I was looking at her, and of this Bible, the back is still broke, she shoved some vines down it to where the vines were coming out. Her lesson for the day that she was teaching was God's Word is living and active, and showing these kids how that is and how that works. Got it? Every time I pick up this Bible, I think God's Word is living and active, and how that affects me. Our Scriptures today, each of those things in there, you want to be blessed, bless. You look at those Scripture

lessons on what it is and how it's intentional. Anybody know anything about the Gideons? Not all pastors will agree with me on this, but one of the essence that the Gideons believed is that God's Word is living and active. How do I mean that? They put it in there. How many people, whatever the reason that they're in there, they pick up the Bible and they open it? Now some would say, "No, the Holy Spirit doesn't work that way." I'll have to agree, don't short the Holy Spirit. Because also in the front of the Gideon's Bible is some statements and Bible verses that you can look up if you're sad, if you're whatever the things may be. Know this, God's Word is living and active. If we can pick up God's Word, and we look at God's Word, we can expect that something will happen.

Let me give you an example. I had a gal come to me that was really struggling in her marriage, her work, being a Christian, just all those things. I sat down and met with her for almost an hour, and we met a couple of different times. Then she was gone for a couple of weeks. Then she came back. She goes, "Pastor, I need to talk to you." Okay, well she didn't seem too bad. As soon as I went into my office, she started crying. She said, "Pastor, I've been praying and praying, and praying, and it's just not happening. I prayed like you told me to, and-" blah, blah, blah, and on. The point is this, I asked her, I said, "Did you read those Scripture lessons that went along with each of those?" She said, "No, I just prayed to God." My point is this, as it was with her, the Holy Spirit works through His Word, through the Word that we find in the Bible. His Words are living and active.

What else is right there? What's that word again? Intentional. When we pray, when we ask God for things... As prayer, I've gone through my life, I'm a second career pastor. I didn't even start Greek until I was 40. What a fool I was. That was harder than I thought. But God had me here for a reason. You see, if I look back at my life and say, "What am I about?" I am about this, empowering God's people for life, helping us see what it is that God would have us do. Today, that word "intentional" has a piece to play on it. I was also a mission planter. My wife and I have planted missions. The first one was in Chula Vista, California, Church of Joy. The second one was Shepherd's Creek in Bradenton out on State Route 70. Then we went up to Michigan, Charlevoix, Michigan, and tried to... It was kind of an interesting thing. You start missions, but you also when a church is dying or almost dead, is going in and redoing that into a church plant. That didn't work. But that's okay. I loved it up there. I loved the people. God worked through us to change peoples' lives, to help them see what it is that God would have them do. As a mission planter, our district has mission institutes that go for a week. They're four different places in the United States. They have anywhere from 50 plus men and their wives there. They talk about mission planting. There was four sections every day for five days. I was the last one. They all talk about "Well yeah, the good thing is, this is how it's supposed to work. This is what you need to do." I was the last one. I was supposed to make it real, make it, "Well what does that look like?" And talk about my experience as a mission planter. The thing I realized through it all, and through the years of ministry, was this, what do you think the most important two things that a mission planter needs to do? Anybody?

Response from Congregation: Be there. Be there.

Be there, yeah. Yeah, it's not only be there, but it's God's Word, you need to be in God's Word, and you need to be in prayer. Without those two, you might as well quit now. Today, in our Scriptures lessons in that, I must say this, we need to be intentional about what we do. That day where that happened, where the kids and doing thing, was that intentional? Well, I would say yes, but I would say yes because they didn't know what to do with it.

As we move through in our lives and through the things that God sets before us, we need to be in His Word and Scripture.

Last story. There was a gentlemen when I first took over and went to this church, he sat there for the first, and then the second week, and then he disappeared. It was like, "Well that was funny. What was the guy's name who always sits there?" Sure, everybody knew because everybody sits in the same spot. That's how they know we're Lutherans. That being said, "Oh, that's James and his wife." I can't remember what his wife's name was, but I said okay. I called him up and I talked to his wife. She says, "Well Pastor," she said, "I got to tell you, you scared my husband half to death." "Oh, what did I do? What did I say?" What happened is I had done like I'm doing here. I stepped down a little bit closer because when I see people aren't paying attention or looking at their watch, that they need a little help. You guys laugh. Two weeks ago, I was down at Redeemer preaching, and the pastor decided he wasn't going to be gone, but he came to the service. He was sitting right there. He looked at his watch. He looked at his watch. I think he did probably four or five times. I looked right at him and said, "You don't need to look at your watch anymore. Pay attention to me." I tell you, I just scared that man to death. But that being said, I met with Jim and we talked about what it was. I said, "You know, the one thing that I tell people, if you don't look up, I won't pick on you." You'll notice people, a lot of times they're... I just don't. I try not to pick on people. When I do, I had talked to them before.

With this, and while I'm out there, I want to hit my next point. My next point is this, we've got God's Word is living and active, and it is with the Spirit. We don't talk about the Spirit a whole lot, but the Spirit in your Bible Class [discussion]. Where is he [the leader]? Was that you in Bible Study? Okay, that was him. He talked about touch, and the ministry of touch. You don't have to know everything, but the ministry of touch has an incredible power that the Holy Spirit uses in us to touch others. Sometimes we fear what it is that somebody may ask us a question and probably as I've been asked, "What makes a person afraid of talking about God in that?" There are those. Some of us, we all have our fears in that, but we all have to really understand intentional and the Holy Spirit on how it works. The touch, wow. I brought up an example of a time when we're out or about, and our next-door neighbor, I'm afraid... I mean, I don't tell him I go to church because I'm afraid he's going to ask something I can't answer. I said, "What is that question that you can't answer?" I said, "Really, there's only two questions and they're quite simple." What is that? He goes, "What if they..." I tell him, I believe in God and he asks why. Well, my statement for him was this, "Hm, you're right, but-" "But what is it?" "Well, I don't know how all of it works. I just know that Jesus loves me."

"Well, how do you know that?" Anybody? Sunday School? Yeah, that God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son to die for us, for me. And that, I don't know, but all I know... "Well, how do you know this?" Anybody? What's the other one? "For the Bible tells me so." That's the only two answers that you have to know. I've seen men that I've worked with, with lives who you would not see God working in their life from their language, to their house and the way they live. But being in God's Word, the Holy Spirit changes us.

Remember at the beginning of the sermon, each of those things, was it Peter? Did the Holy Spirit come onto him? Was it each of those thousands of men and women that the Holy Spirit come onto them? Or was he that Billy Graham speaker? God is good. God has given us all we need. Sometimes if we feel like, "God, where are you? I need your help." You know those prayers that we have in church, the prayer... What else time do we pray? We're Lutherans. We love to eat. So, before dinner.

What else? Go to bed at night. Does that cover them all? Yeah. But this is where God reaches and touches us in a way that we can't figure out why. That's why in the sermons, in the stuff people go, "Oh, I really loved your sermon, Pastor," blah, blah, blah. And I said, "What did you like about it?" "Um, well you really talked about my 'whatevers' that I have going on in my life today." I'm going, "Uh-oh, did I grab the wrong sermon? I don't remember that one." But that's the Holy Spirit that works in each and every one of our lives.

God is a blessing. Heavenly Father, we thank You for just that blessing that You give us in life, of Your Son who died on the cross, who gave His only life that we could have eternal life with You. We pray that You would walk with us this week, help us to think, "Hm, intentional. How can I be intentional about what I do?" When I pray and read also a verse in Your Scripture, have the Holy Spirit to lift us up and give us that one thing that only He can give, and that's peace. Thank you, Lord.

We thank You for each other, and this day, this beautiful day that You have made. In Jesus's name. Amen.