

The Fourth Sunday after Trinity
14 July, Anno Domini 2019
St. Luke 6:36-42
Pr. Kurt Ulmer

In the Name of the Father, and of the +Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Christ is such a masterful teacher and in one short sentence our Savior lays before us the very essence of the true Christian faith and life. “Be merciful even (or better, in the same way) as your Father is merciful.” But let’s be sure we don’t get things out of order. We are told to be merciful, but our mercy begins with, flows from the mercy which God has shown us. This is not a formula for how to be saved. Rather, Christ is speaking to His disciples who already confess Him to be the Messiah whom the Father has sent into the world just as He promised Adam and Eve and Abraham and Joseph and David. These words are spoken to those who have already, presumably, come to know the mercy of God which is only in Christ Jesus.

Dear baptized, your Father, who art in heaven, is merciful! He does not hate you or despise you or look upon you with contempt. He has forgiven you. He has laid all the guilt of your sins on His Son, the Lamb of God. Though He has every right to condemn you for your sin, He takes absolutely no pleasure in doing so. He desires mercy, not sacrifice because He is mercy. He is true love because He is so completely and joyfully willing to empty Himself to save and bless even His most bitter enemies, those who deny even His existence, those who deny the forgiveness which cost the precious life of His beloved Son. He is slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love because He delights in your eternal salvation and life. This isn’t because you are so great, but because His love is so inexpressibly profound. Consider the fact that God did not take on human flesh when He gave the Divine Law on Mt. Sinai, the Law which reveals our sin, the perfect Law which always condemns and accuses us and shows us that we are truly unclean sinners, having hearts that are filled with hatred and lust and selfishness.

No, Almighty God reserved His incarnation for His great act of deliverance, which in its glory far surpassed the fire and smoke and shaking of Mt. Sinai, bearing in His own sinless flesh the punishment for sin which rightly should fall to you and me. God took on your flesh to save not to condemn. He gave His only begotten Son so that whoever believes in Him, whoever trusts in Him, whoever hides themselves under the shelter of His outstretched arms should NOT perish, but have eternal life. God became like you to save you from eternal death and to give you

eternal life. His crucified and risen flesh, given to His children as true food, is the impregnable fortress behind which our conscience is kept safe. No sin or death can overcome the one who has declared salvation to be entirely accomplished as He breathed His last and who rose triumphantly from the grave. Though they tirelessly seek to assail your conscience, sin and death will stumble and fall, they will break against the glorified flesh of Christ like water on rock and will not harm you. They are powerless against the mercy of God which is ours in Christ Jesus, mercy which gave His only-begotten Son to the death of the cross, mercy which diverted all of God's wrath against sin away from us to the innocent flesh of the Lamb.

And what have you done to deserve any of this? Nothing. Absolutely nothing. What must you do to earn this mercy? Nothing. Absolutely nothing. What can you do to earn this mercy? Nothing. Absolutely nothing. It is the free gift of God which He wants you to have. What will flesh offer that is so prone to petty arguments, to lying, to setting up all kinds of false gods, to adulterous and covetous thoughts, to love of such foolish things as money and days of ease, to laziness and pride, to turning a deaf ear even when the Lord God Himself is speaking in His Word and through the proclamation of the ones whom He has sent to you, to despising prayer, the treasure of Holy Baptism, the comfort of the Absolution, and the communion of Christ's true Body and Blood? We can offer nothing. Absolutely nothing. And to imagine otherwise is absurd and makes a mockery of the Divine Word.

The only thing we do have to offer that is pleasing to God is our confession, our cries of repentance and a hunger for the rich mercy of God, mercy which we would never even begin to hope for except that God has made His mercy known through the life, death, and resurrection of His Son, our Lord, Jesus Christ. No one would ever imagine that God would be merciful to such poor, wretched, thankless, sinners as us. We can only imagine that we must strive and strain with every fiber of our being to live better and holier lives so that perhaps God will take pity on us and reward our feeble attempts at righteousness. This is the delusion and lie of every false religion, whatever it is called.

But there is nothing more pleasing in the ears of our heavenly Father than our cries for His mercy because that is very thing He loves to give more than anything else. He delights in saving sinners. Seeking God in His mercy is to offer Him the highest praise and glory because that is what He has revealed Himself to be in His Word and through His Son. It is the highest insult and blasphemy to try to approach Him in any other way or by any other means. He would freely declare

you righteous and forgiven for the sake of His Son. His mercy is for those who fear Him from generation to generation. That is His will for each and every one of you - to be saved from the just punishment of your sins. His desire is to spare you from eternal death. If that's not what He wanted then He certainly never would have sent His Son and absolutely would never have had Him nailed to the cross.

But He did. The apostles and so many others saw and heard it with their own eyes and their own ears and by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit have written down their eye-witness so that you may believe and by believing have life in Jesus' Name. Believe Him who didn't spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all. Do not make Him a liar as though He offered up His Son in jest. When He says your sins are forgiven, He means it. When He says "Take, eat...this is for you", He absolutely means it. In the Holy Sacraments which our Lord instituted He gives you tangible pledges of His mercy so that you may not doubt but firmly believe.

But if we will not trust God's mercy and His promise, then we will have to confront God through our works and those works will condemn us twice over before the throne of judgment. Once because they are wholly insufficient and filled with sin and the second time because we would dare to replace the precious Blood of God's Son with our own sinful works. God is merciful but His mercy is found only in Christ. Apart from the crucified, there remains only wrath and judgment. Do not seek God apart from the fount of His mercy, apart from the Lord Jesus. If you do, your conscience will never know peace either in this life or in the life to come.

Christ has come into your midst today to show you mercy. He has not come to judge or condemn you but to forgive you and to give your conscience peace and rest in overflowing abundance. He has come and gathered you here so that you can, in faith, dwell in His house, feast at His table, rejoice in the rich mercy of your heavenly Father, and pour out to your neighbor the same mercy which you enjoy.

This is the fruit which the mercy of God bears in His children. You can be patient with the casual weaknesses of your neighbor because your heavenly Father bears with yours. You can cover over their sins and not judge or condemn as unworthy of mercy because you, with all the ugliness of your own sin, have been covered in the righteousness of Christ. You have been freed by God's mercy from any need to be angry or bear grudges or live lives filled with greed or fear. These things will not help you or benefit you. As you have been shown mercy, so also you have been called to show mercy to all, even those who persecute you, slander you, and seek to harm you. A heart that is filled with the mercy of God is one that cannot

but be merciful to its neighbor no matter the depth of his need or whether he deserves it. You cannot be merciless and filled with anger and bitterness while laying claim to the mercy of Christ. A Christian is merciful, quick to forgive, because he has known the peace of God's forgiveness.

Your Father is merciful. May God grant that you may daily find comfort and peace in His abundant mercy which is yours in Christ Jesus. And may His mercy overflow from you to all those around you who likewise are need in of mercy.

In the Name of +Jesus.