

The Fourth Sunday after Trinity
5 July, Anno Domini 2020
Romans 12:14-21
Pr. Kurt Ulmer

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

The level of vitriolic hatred everywhere is reaching astronomical heights. It doesn't matter what side of any of the issues you fall on, there is a vast and sweeping current of rage and anger against our neighbor washing over us like a tidal wave. I'm not even sure we can talk about the weather without it somehow turning into an argument. At times we treat or speak about those who disagree with us as sub-human. "If you don't agree with me you're stupid, bigoted, dumb, hopeless, evil, or all of the above."

Fear and despair are also rising off the charts. Many are afraid we won't ever be able to go back to the way things were (whatever that means). Everyone else is afraid that we will. Sections of cities are taken over and destroyed by rioters, neighbors are arming themselves against their neighbors. Very hard lines are being drawn in the sand. Broad generalizations and accusations are being used to paint large swaths of people. Everyone is looking sideways at one another, sizing one another up, assuming the worst. Many are even itching for a fight.

And, of course, I am justified in my murderous thoughts and words. I'm right, after all, and anyone who thinks differently is wrong. We read the news and the bitter accusations and derogatory comments soon follow. "What jerks!" "They are so stupid!" "They should all be thrown into prison!" "They are ruining everything!" We seek to make excuses for our mercilessness and our puffed up haughtiness. We try to show how much smarter and better we are than those we disagree with. We call names. We dishonor. We shame. We gloat and revel in the downfall of our opponents and persecutors and enemies.

That's why the words of the apostle in today's epistle are of such importance and why everyone of us ought to hang our heads in shame. We have done exactly the opposite of what our Lord commands us. We curse our enemies. We envy those who do well. We blame and dismiss those who weep. We fan the flames of bitterness just as badly as anyone else. And who among us isn't wise in his own sight? We all have opinions on everything and love the opportunity to grace the world with our infinite wisdom and understanding. We are lightning quick to speak and eternally slow to listen. And you can be darn sure I'm going to avenge

myself! Do you honestly expect me to just roll over while people insult me and make my life difficult and attack my rights?

Repent. Take a good and honest look at the evil and the darkness that dwells within your own heart. Don't turn away from it. Don't deny it. Don't hide it. Confess it. The same evil you hate in others you can find firmly entrenched within yourself. You have not been merciful as you ought. You have raised yourself up above your spouse, your children, your neighbor, and your enemy. Rather than suffer persecution and hatred and wrong you have sought to take the Lord's vengeance. You have failed to trust that Lord will bring every evil into the light in due season. You have wished God's fierce wrath against your neighbor while you enjoy the Lord's rich mercy. You have spoken and wished and perhaps even caused evil to befall your neighbor because "he deserved it." You delighted in his suffering and turned a blind eye when he was in need.

Would you like the holy and righteous Judge deal with you as you have dealt with your neighbor? Would you prefer the One who knows your every thought and every desire better than you, to judge you solely on your merits and your worthiness? Do you want God to deal with you exactly as you deserve? I should certainly hope not. Anyone who does is a hardened fool who is completely blind to his own sin and believes nothing that he hears in Scripture. That man, more than any, needs the pity of God to bring the hammer of the Law down upon him so that he can rightly see and repent before the Day of Judgment springs like a steel trap and he is lost to eternal judgment.

The truth is that we ALL need God to deal with us mercifully, to not look at our sins or deny our prayers because of them. Our hearts have tolerated such rage and hatred and impiety that God would be completely justified in condemning us for all of eternity. We have loved justice more than mercy. We have loved division more than peace. We have loved ourselves more than God or our neighbor. If we see what is going on in the world and don't accept full responsibility for it as one of the sinners who is contributing to the problem, then there can be no healing, no peace, no unity - only more of the same and far worse. You cannot love your neighbor and seek his good if you think that you are in any way better than he is and refuse to pray God's mercy and blessing upon him and seek his good. If that is the position from which you would address your neighbor then forget winning him to the truth because you yourself aren't interested in the truth. You are a blind man leading a blind man into a ditch. You will both be lost and your neighbor's blood will be on your head.

How guilty we all are of letting the television or tweets or 15-second news clips shape our view of those around us. We are falling for the trap of using what we see happening as an excuse to turn on our neighbor either because of his skin color or his political ideology. This is not befitting at all for the children of God who have known God's great mercy in Christ. See what God has done for His enemies, us - He offered up His only-begotten Son to save us from our own foolishness and deserved death. He didn't deal with us as we deserve. He dealt with us according to His mercy and His steadfast love. He trusted the gracious will and word of His Father and silently endured all manner of demonic evil and false accusations and cruelties, like a sheep silently standing before the shearers. He patiently endured the ravings of sinful men, even to the point of allowing Himself to be nailed to the cross, in order to save them...in order to save you. He didn't stand up crying out "My rights! My rights!" He wasn't interested in sparing Himself or defending Himself. He left that up to God and concerned Himself only with showing mercy to us poor, merciless sinners. That is who He is. He is the Lord, the Deliverer and Redeemer.

Dear sinner, consider God's great mercy toward you. He laid all of your sin on Jesus and punished Him instead. He forgave you. He cast your sins behind His back. He washed away your guilt and gave you a seat at His table. He bestowed upon you His own righteousness as a gift. He raised you from death to life and made you His beloved child. He was incomprehensibly rich in mercy toward us poor, merciless sinners.

God has had mercy upon you. He has blotted out your iniquities. Not a single ounce of your guilt is laid to your account. Instead, the Blood of Christ has made full atonement so that your enemies can do you no harm. You have no need to hate them or fear them, be they man or devil, because they are powerless against the mercy and forgiveness of God. Christ rose in triumph and is seated at the right hand of God. Not the world. Not the devil. No one can take God's mercy away from you. No one, no matter how viciously they attack you or your reputation or your earthly goods can separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus. They are beating the wind. You are safe. You can actually pity them in their folly as God has pitied you. Eat and drink of the Lord's mercy. Rejoice in all that He has forgiven you. Then turn in mercy toward your neighbor, no matter how wrong or evil you think he is. Pray that the Lord would unite us all under the truth of His Word. Bless those who hate you and want to hurt you. Christ died for them just as He died for you and He desires their salvation. Rejoice with others in their joys and successes and mourn with those who have lost regardless of why. You do not need to defend yourself because the Lord will defend you and vindicate the truth,

even if you must lay down your life to speak and defend it. Do not foolishly squander the Lord's rich mercy by withholding it from others. Be as lavish with it toward them as God has been with you that together you might enter into eternal life.

In the Name of +Jesus.