

St Paul's Lutheran Church (Latimer, IA)
Trinity 4 – July 2, 2023
Luke 6:36-42 – Right Judgment
Pastor Peter Wagner

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Today's readings are about forgiveness and godly love toward our neighbor, even our enemies. Like Joseph, freely forgiving his brothers. What his brothers meant for evil, God worked out for good. And like the apostle Paul in Romans 12, **"Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse."**

In our reading from Luke 6, Jesus has the clearest instructions for godly living according to the law of love. **"Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful. Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you."**

With each of these lines, our Lord teaches what we should do for others, flowing out of what we've received from God. True obedience flows from the gospel. What we do for God and our neighbor reflects what God has done for us for Jesus' sake.

Law and gospel go together, neither can be neglected. The law that Jesus preaches is good. God is pleased when we give generously, show mercy, and forgive. But each of these law statements has the gospel as its basis and motivation. Believing the gospel is greater than fulfilling the law, as much as God's works are greater than ours. Apart from the gospel no one even begins to keep the law. **"Be merciful."** is incomplete without the gospel, without, **"Even as your Father is merciful."** We learn mercy by recognizing our heavenly Father's mercy. That God has called himself our Father is mercy beyond measure. We deserve hell, but our Father has adopted us through baptism as cherished sons.

"Forgive, and you will be forgiven." The law is: Forgive. We must do it. We get to do it. When we refuse to forgive, we despise God's forgiveness. Like the parable of the unforgiving servant, who was forgiven an enormous debt but refused to forgive a small debt owed to him. You also get to forgive. Because you are forgiven freely for Jesus' sake, you forgive because Christ is living in you. Forgiveness and mercy are the proof of living faith, the response of thanksgiving to God's gifts.

"Give, and it will be given to you." The law is: Give. We must do it. We get to do it. Those who hold on to earthly possessions reveal how little they appreciate God's heavenly gifts. We get to give, because of how much we have been given. Faith and righteousness shine out in forgiveness, generosity, and mercy. For the gospel behind it all is that you have been forgiven by God. You have received grace and mercy, true heavenly gifts!

What a blessing to me and my family to experience your generosity. Before we even arrived in Latimer, you generously reached out to us, to make us feel welcome and loved. You worked hard to get the parsonage ready, you even planted a garden. Then when we arrived, a big group came to help unload the truck. Then there was food left for us in the fridge, gift cards for gas and groceries, and housewarming gifts. You gave us furniture that we needed, and you checked in on us daily. Your generosity has been overwhelming, and I don't know how to adequately thank you. I've seen the living proof of Christ in you, proof of the riches of God's forgiveness and mercy overflowing in love for others. And I pray that through this living faith, God will also grant you the good measure of heavenly blessings – forgiveness, life and salvation – pressed down, shaken together, running over into your lap.

But of all the lines in our text, perhaps the most difficult is: Judge not. **"Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned."** Unbelievers love to quote it, the world smears it in our face. Don't judge me! Jesus said so! Don't accuse me of sin. Keep your nose in your own business. Stop being judgmental and hateful! Get the log out of your own eye, and let me worry about the speck in mine, if a speck is even there. You Christians have no right to criticize. Don't tell me how to live my life! Don't preach against homosexuality. Love is love. Don't tell me not to live with my girlfriend. Or get an abortion. Or change my gender. You aren't the judge of me. You're a hypocrite.

And maybe the world is right. It's true. We are sinners and hypocrites. Do we have any right to judge? Maybe we should pay more attention to the log in our own eyes, to our own sins and shortcomings. We know we have no excuse, as Paul says in Romans 2, **"Do you suppose, O man – you who judge those who practice such things and yet do them yourself – that you will escape the judgment of God?"** Maybe we should just shut up, keep to ourselves, and stop preaching against sin. What's the use anyway, if they won't listen?

This is especially hard with loved ones. We can't let them go. We can't agree to disagree. We can't shut up, because we love them. We want them to return to the path of life. Nothing hurts like when you try to speak to your child or brother or friend, but they only hear you speaking hateful judgment. And they cut you off. How can we speak the truth in love? How can we show our loved ones that we speak the law for the sake of the gospel, for their salvation?

Look back at the text. The law is: Judge not. But like the rest of the lines, Judge not is incomplete without the gospel promise behind it: **"You will not be judged; you will not be condemned."** There's no better gospel. We, who were God's enemies, will stand confidently at the heavenly judgment throne, because God has declared that he is our Father! Through baptism into Christ Jesus his Son we are his beloved sons! We will not be condemned, we will not be judged. We have nothing to fear, our inheritance is life forever.

And it's not because of anything we've done. It's by the great free gift of God. We ought to have been judged guilty, but he suffered our judgment for us. We ought to have been condemned, but he was condemned in our place to the cross. Because of his work, you will not be judged, you will not be condemned. And that, dear saints, is pure gospel.

Why does the world twist and pervert this pure gospel? **"You will not be judged."** Why don't they see that when we speak against sin in the world, we speak in love, not hate? We speak the law because we want to get to this gospel. It's not judgmental. We want them to turn and live. For Christ is surely coming to judge the living and the dead. And those who do not repent will be condemned. So we long for our loved ones, even our enemies, to share in the blessings we have of forgiveness and salvation in Jesus. We want them to believe this gospel and receive the Holy Spirit. He alone changes stubborn hearts and opens eyes to see how much our loving God has done for the world in Jesus.

Another line in the text that we should pay attention to: Jesus said, **"A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher."** We're called to imitate our teacher, with patience. If we're going to be like him, we must not set ourselves up to judge on our own authority, but only on the authority of the word of God. For our teacher refused to take authority to himself. He did not judge of his own accord, but because the Father put all things under his feet. As he said in John 8:16, **"It is not I alone who judge, but I and the Father who sent me."**

So right judgment is imitating our teacher according to the word of God. Right judgment is by the authority of God, according to your vocation and station in life. Right judgment is quick to listen and slow to speak, with humility and love. And right judgment helps your brother remove the speck from his eye, while always repenting and praying that God remove the log in yours.

So listen to your teacher. He calls you to set aside your pride, taking up your cross and following him. He calls you to judge with right judgment, not judging by appearances, but by the heart. He calls you to learn love and mercy. For he came not to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. In John 12:47 he said, **"I did not come to judge the world but to save the world."** Mercy and truth have met in Christ, righteousness and peace have kissed. He suffered the wrath of the Father. He suffered your just condemnation to reconcile you. And now out of his great love he does not keep silent before the Father, but continually intercedes on your behalf. And in him, when you stand before the judgment throne, the verdict you will hear is Not Guilty. Your guilt is covered by his blood, your iniquity atoned for.

And be comforted, dear saints. Do not worry when the world and even your loved ones scoff. Remember the beautiful words of 2 Timothy 2:19, **"God's firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: The Lord knows those that are his."** Not one of his sheep shall be lost. Amen.

Now may the peace of God which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, unto life everlasting. Amen.