

**SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY**

**FEBRUARY 20, 2022**

**"Be Merciful As God is Merciful"**

**Luke 6:27-38**

**Grace, mercy and peace be to each of you from God our Father and from His Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord.**

**Amen.**

**Will you pray with me? May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight O Lord, our Strength and our Redeemer.**

**Amen.**

**The text for our sermon this morning is the Gospel of the Day, from St Luke's Gospel, which I would like to read again, "[Jesus said:] "But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. To one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from one**

**who takes away your cloak do not withhold your tunic either. Give to everyone who begs from you, and from one who takes away your goods do not demand them back. And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them.**

**“If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to get back the same amount. But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. 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. Good measure, pressed**

**down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you.”**

**When Jonah was told to go and preach to the people of Nineveh, he said, "No way. Why those people might listen to my words and repent, and You, O Lord, would relent and not punish them. They deserve punishment. They have been brutal to my people. The Ninevites don't deserve any mercy. They can just go straight to hell. I will see them rot in hell before I try to help them." These exact words are not written in the Bible, but that is the gist of what Jonah said before he jumped on a sea-freighter and headed across the Mediterranean to Spain. But God! Yes, "But God". But God had other plans. Fortunately for us and for all people, God has intervened in our lives for our eternal salvation. People are sinful the world around and certainly deserving of God's fierce wrath, but God thinks instead of love and mercy.**

**We love those who are nice to us. This week you may have sent someone a Valentine's Card. We send valentines to those who respond to our actions. We never send valentines to those who are unkind to us. But God says, "Love your enemies." That is what He does. And praise be to God that He does, because we and all humanity were at enmity with God at one point in time. Prior to our Baptism, we were enemies of God. And, even now, there are moments when we decide to walk contrary to His way. In each of those moments we are an enemy of God. It is written in Romans 8:7 -- "The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so." But, God loves us anyway and thinks on mercy when He reaches out His loving arms to embrace us and love us back to Him. It is written in Romans 3:22b-24 -- "There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus."**

**God loves the whole world in Christ. That includes you and it includes me and it includes us while we are sinners. It is written in Romans 5:8 -- "But God demonstrates His own love for us in this; While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." While we were enemies of God, He loved us. He loves us even now when we sin.**

**Like God, we are to love our enemies. That surely runs counter to our way of thinking. We are like Jonah. They can rot in hell for all we care. Why, it is unthinkable that I should do anything good for her after what she said. I wouldn't even think of helping him again after the way he criticized what I did. After all, in the Old Testament, God told Moses to write this law: "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." But God says in Romans 12:19 -- "Vengeance is mine; I will repay." God expects us to pray for our enemies. He also expects us to speak out about their sinful actions, calling them to repentance, but we are to do that in a loving manner, trying to**

**do something good for them.**

**Jesus has set a goal before us that we will never fully meet, but nevertheless, we should strive to attain, namely -- "Love one another as God loves us." The goal of all this love for those who are enemies of God is that they might repent of their sinful activities and turn to God. That is exactly what Jonah did not want. And, unfortunately, that is what too many people of today do not want. Such an attitude is neither loving nor merciful.**

**Paul wrote to the Romans, in Chapter 12:20, the words of Solomon in Proverbs: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." This means that as we are nice to our enemies, our enemies will be confused, wondering why we are doing such things because it is so out of the ordinary. The ordinary is for us to retaliate, but God has other ways that heal differences and reconcile people to one**

another and to Him.

He says that we should pray for those who spitefully use us and who persecute us. When our Lord Jesus was on the cross, He prayed for those who crucified Him, saying: "Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing." That prayer is effectively for us as well, because when we commit some sinful activity, at that moment, we do not know how much we are grieving our Lord and God. So, just as our Lord Jesus prayed for us and for our forgiveness, even before we were born, so also, He is calling us to pray for those who are hateful and spiteful to us.

It is far better for us to suffer wrong than for us to do wrong. If we retaliate to someone's hurtful actions, then a war begins, as there continues to be retaliation. Someone has to stop and say I'm sorry for whatever has been done. Then, there can be forgiveness and healing of hurts. We show that we are children of God by doing the unthinkable. And, as we do the

**unthinkable, God has promised to give us a great reward in heaven where we will celebrate with Jesus Christ as full heirs of God the Father.**

**We are told by God to give, because He gives liberally to us. In the explanation to the First Article, we confess that God has given us everything we need for this life, even the air we breathe and the ability to breathe that air. Further, God richly and daily provides us with all that we need to support our life on this earth. Moreover, God defends us against all danger, and guards and protects us from all evil, all because of His great mercy and grace.**

**In turn, we are encouraged to give as HE has given to us. We are to give unselfishly, not thinking of our self first. God tells us to give generously and to do it with a smile in our heart. But, we have scrimped and saved to get what we have. We have worked hard to get this and we want to hold onto it. Why? Who gave us the health and the intelligence to be able**

**to work for what we have? Who set the jobs in front of us so that we could work? Who gave us the skills to perform what was asked of us? The answer to all these questions is "God." God has provided, in every detail, all that we have. Everything we have belongs to HIM. We are merely stewards of His great and abundant gifts to us. And, if He sets an opportunity in front of us to give to someone in need, He has the power to give back whatever we give away. Isn't our problem really that we trust in ourselves rather than in God? Isn't it that we doubt whether God will give back what we want for our self? Isn't that really why we are reluctant to give of what we have?**

**God has promised to bless the cheerful giver. God has promised that as we give to Him of the first fruits, the first portion of the many blessings HE has given to us, that He will throw open the flood gates of heaven and pour out on us more than we can ever expect. "Test me," God says. Try it, you'll like it. Try being a cheerful giver, giving to God the best of**

**what you have and then stand back and watch and see what HE will do in your life.**

**The next aspect of being merciful is that of forgiveness. God forgives. He does this for Jesus sake and God forgives all those who are sorry. Our Lord Jesus suffered and died for the sins of the whole world. Therefore, there is far more grace and forgiveness available than will ever be used. Christ died for the sins of the whole world, but there are only a few who accept His offer. Yes, it is so very unfortunate, there are many who refuse to accept what God is offering, for free, to all who will believe in Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Savior.**

**Moreover, God not only forgives all who accept His free gift, He also forgets all our sins. The story is told of the time when a cardinal of the Roman Catholic church in the Philippines, was called to check out a young woman's claim that she had seen Jesus in a vision. "My dear," the bishop said, "next time you see Jesus, would you ask him what sin your bishop**

committed when he was a young theologian." When she returned some time later, the bishop asked, "Did you ask him about the sin I committed as a young man?" "Yes, I did." she said. "And what was his reply?" inquired the curious bishop. "His reply was, "I don't remember." Isn't it beautiful to know that not one of Peter's denials of Christ are written in heaven? And, that not one of the murders, in which St. Paul assisted, are written in heaven. Likewise, none of our sins are written in the book of life. We do sin, but as we sincerely repent of them, they are gone, washed away in the flood of blood that poured from the cross of Calvary.

In thankful recognition of the great debt that has been taken from our shoulders, we respond by readily forgiving others and not by condemning them or judging them critically. Rather, we ought to point out their obvious and overt sins for which they seem not to be sorry. However, this must be done in as loving way as possible, so that these may be brought

**into the kingdom of God.**

**Our motivation is the great grace and mercy poured out on us by God our Father for the sake of His Son, our Savior Jesus Christ. Our motivation is the great gift of forgiveness, painfully earned for us at the cross, and freely given to us. God has first given to us. We have been in such great debt and have been relieved of all that debt, as God has gifted us with forgiveness of sins. Now we are free to help those who are in debt to us. God's love and mercy flow through us, like a conduit, to those around us. We show our thankfulness and gratitude to God by sharing with others as we have been given to, because we know that what is at stake is nothing less than this: rescuing sinners from everlasting death and destruction.**

**And, by the power of God, we can give them the message which brings them into eternal life. When we seriously consider the great and abundant mercy of God which He has poured out in our lives, we will then respond in thanksgiving**

**and compassion toward others, in Christ.**

**Amen.**

**Now may the peace of God which surpasses all human understanding, keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus**

**Amen.**