**Be Merciful**

**Luke 6:36-42**

Trinity IV – July 5, 2020

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen

Our text begins with two words, “Be merciful!” And the world loves to grab those two words and talk about them. That is problematic as they fail to truly examine what they mean in regard to the next few, “even as your Father is merciful.”

We can listen to the voices of the world in regard to the mercies of God, but their understanding is that God will not punish wrongdoing, that God turns a blind eye to sin, or that He has changed His mind about what He had previously called sin. But that is patently false! It is a lie!

Some would say that being merciful has to do with having sympathy toward them, and there is certainly that connotation, but how – in what manner? That answer was given in the words of Jesus preceding our text, and also in His instructions following the parable Jesus tells in the last portion of our text.

Preceding our text Jesus speaks of how we are to treat those who sin against us – mercifully. He explains how we are to treat the speck we see in our neighbor’s eye (the sinfulness in our neighbor), and how we should treat the log in our own eye (our own sinfulness). In either case the log and the speck are to be removed, they do not belong in the eye. Sinfulness does not belong; it needs to be removed. The question is, “How?”

In Exodus, there was an incident up on the mountain after Moses had smashed the two tablets God had cut out of the stone and written on. Moses was again on the mountain…

*Then the Lord passed by in front of him and proclaimed, “The Lord, the Lord God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations.”* (Ex. 34:6-7)

Yes, God will punish the guilty, and those who continue in the sins of their fathers, will also be guilty. But God does not desire that, He desires to be merciful. He desires to forgive iniquity, transgression, and sin. Indeed, there needs to be punishment for that sin. God is perfectly just, so He cannot just let it all go away. There is a price that is owed for sin, and that price must be paid – He does not simply let it go and look past it.

Last week we examined the Old Testament lesson from Micah, and it was plain that God does not simply look past sin. Do you remember what it said?

Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not retain his anger forever, because He delights in steadfast love. He will again have compassion on us; He will tread our iniquities under foot. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea. (Micah 7:18-19)

This is interesting, because this text does not say that God believes sinful behavior is acceptable, but that He deals with the sinfulness in His own manner. His manner is merciful.

Throughout the history of God’s church in the Old Testament, that is, throughout the history of Israel, God is merciful even as His law must be observed, and justice must be served. And we see it all the way from the beginning.

Adam and Eve in the garden were disobedient, having been warned that disobedience would bring death. An animal died to cover their sin, and it was promised that One offspring of Eve (a prophecy of the virgin birth) would crush the head of Satan, even as He would suffer.

Throughout Biblical history, we hear God’s promises. Then we watch His people be disobedient. God forgives them as they make the sacrifices, He requires to appease His just nature, but they must be repeated for they are incomplete. Those sacrifices always points forward to the greater Sacrifice to come, the sacrifice alluded to when God commanded Abraham to offer his son, his only son whom he loved, as a sacrifice to God.

It is the Father who is merciful by giving His only begotten Son to die upon the cross as the substitutionary payment for the sins of all mankind.

It is in the death of Christ that iniquity is pardoned.

It is in the death of Christ that transgressions are passed over.

It is in the death of Christ that His anger against sin is appeased.

It is in the death of Christ that His steadfast love finds it’s delight.

It is in the death of Christ that He has compassion on us.

It is in the death of Christ that the iniquities of us all are tread under foot.

It is in the death of Christ that the Father is merciful, granting forgiveness and peace.

Be merciful is Jesus’ word to us to drive us to our knees in repentance. For of all sinners, I am the worst.

Throughout Scripture we see the mercy of the heavenly Father toward us. Although He should not be, He is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and overflowing in mercy. He does not always accuse, nor will he harbor His anger forever. He does not deal with us as we deal with each other, or repay us as we deserve. As the heavens are high above the earth. That is how great His mercy is toward those who fear Him; as far as the east is from the west, that is how far He removes our transgressions from us.

This mercy of God is not just talked about or demonstrated here or there. It is lived and done for us, and then planted within us. That is why our Father puts to death His Son, so that we might have forgiveness for our sins, be reconciled with God, live a new life, and have the Son of God Himself living and breathing His life within us and through us.

If God our Father has been so merciful to us, is it such a small thing to be merciful toward others? If our heavenly Father does not stand in judgment over us, then is it right that we stand in judgment over others? If our Father no longer demands of us, but instead plants His Son's Body and Blood within us so that we might live in love toward Him and others, is not this love of God made known when we deal with each other in kindness and gentleness and in a spirit which desires to do for others rather than having them do for us?

Dearly beloved, let us love one another, not with the world's love which always wants something in return. Let us love, with the love of God which the Holy Spirit has poured into our hearts by the Gospel of Christ.

Love in the Word which He speaks to us and His Body and Blood with which He feeds us. Let us deal with each other in mercy, not looking for what benefits us but working only for what benefits someone else.

Let us not stand in judgment toward each other or be harsh and demanding, but instead recall the mercies of our God and live in and from all the gifts we receive from Christ - His precious Word sacrifice given to us - as we deal with each other.

Dear friends, take to heart and treasure this mercy and compassion of God given to you in Word and Supper. Hear, taste and see that the Lord is good. Long to hear our Lord's absolution and hope in His mercy toward you. Beloved, if God so loved us, let this love of God now live in you and through you – in your homes, in your church, in your work place and in all your dealings with each other. For our Lord desires mercy, and not sacrifice; and the love of God more than making sure others toe the line.

And this is the love of God, that He offered up His Son on the Cross for our benefit, and even now, by His Spirit, lays down and plants within us His Son's Body and Blood for your good and for the good of all.

Be merciful – be full of God’s mercy! Amen.