**What Is “Merciful”?**

**Luke 6:36-42**

Trinity IV – 07.10.2022

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

Our Gospel lesson begins with these words of Jesus, “Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.”

Now there's a phrase packed with baggage. Or at least that is what many people think. But what it truly boils down to, is an understanding of one word, merciful. What does it mean to be merciful?

Incredibly, mercifulness is often misunderstood. Many people believe that to be merciful is allow someone to do whatever they want. And when they hear Jesus saying that we are to be merciful, as our Father is merciful, they believe Jesus wants us to ignore anything anybody else does, at least in regard to what many call moral issues. Or should I say, this is what they would like it to mean in regard to issues they would reduce to moral issues rather than the commands of God.

They cherry pick the commandments to which they appeal to mercy. For example, we are not to be merciful to thieves – those who violate the seventh commandment. We are not to be merciful to murderers – those who violate the fifth commandment.

Ooops, I am so sorry. We are not to be merciful to those who choose to murder the children in their own womb. In fact, we are supposed to allow this freely, because we are to be merciful to those who violate the sixth commandment.

We are also supposed to be merciful to those who want to choose to end their own life because it has somehow become inconvenient to them or more than they want to endure. In some countries, we are merciful to the children of those who have decided to end the lives of their elder because their life has become inconvenient to those children.

It is interesting that immediately following Jesus’ words, “Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.” is His statement which is possibly the most misunderstood and misquoted of His statements. It is the only appeal to Christianity of those begging us to allow them to do whatever they want in regard to certain moral issues. They want us to be merciful most especially when they disregard the 6th and 8th commandment issues.

However, they do not want us to be merciful as God defines it. In their dictionary, merciful means that we ignore their violations of God’s law, we simply let it pass.

Many take the phrase spoken by Jesus, “Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned;” and go no further in the text. That is as far as they go, excluding His words immediately following, “forgive and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, press down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you.”

And of course, many Christians misquote a portion of that as well. They use it wrongly, as if somehow – in the middle of a sentence on forgiveness – Jesus is suddenly talking about giving a money to others, or to God. AND, if you do it generously enough, God will make you wealthy.

OK, listen to it again. “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.” This is a passage about forgiveness. With the measure you forgive, you will be forgiven. Jesus told us we are to forgive 70 times 7 times. And, that if we do not forgive, our heavenly Father will not forgive us.

We are to be merciful – we are to forgive. In fact, that is the point of Torah, what many call the Law. We are to live in the revelation of God in Christ Jesus. We are to love, as God loves us – mercifully.

Jesus continues with a parable: “Can a blind man lead a blind man? Will they both not fall into a pit? A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher. Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, ‘Brother, let me take out the speck that is in your eye,’ when you yourself do not see the log that is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take out the speck that is in your brother's eye.”

Jesus does not tell us not to judge because we are not to call people to repentance. Jesus is telling us not to be judgmental. We are not to act as if we are superior to others – as if we do not need the mercy of God, His forgiveness. We are not to look down our noses at others as if we are superior to them.

God is the only judge. And yes, there will be some who are lost eternally. Some will be condemned to the eternal torments of hell. It will not be nice! However, we are not to declare to them that they are going to hell.

We are however, to be repentant, removing the log from our own eye. And then, with our blindness removed, we are to lead others to repentance. We are to clear their eyes of specks, that they might see the mercies of God. It is in God’s mercifulness that the logs are removed from our own eyes.

What is merciful? God's grace! Jesus Christ! That God would send His Son into our flesh to remove our sin, nail it to the cross, and rise on the third day to declare all that ***our glory***? That is merciful!

That God would command that I am baptized into Christ's death and resurrection, and given a new life…that is merciful!

This is the same mercy that he gives to you in the waters of baptism. You are a new creature – forgiven and blessed with the life of Christ, by the gracious act of your loving God. That is not only a definition of merciful, it is a merciful act.

Reflecting on our Old Testament lesson, we would agree if Joseph had exacted his pound of flesh from his brothers for what they had done to him. He could have pointed out how they now bowed down before him, just as his prophetic vision had foretold when he was a child.

He could have, but he was merciful – he forgave them. He was merciful to them, as God had been merciful to him, granting him forgiveness and giving to him this great opportunity and position of authority to forgive his brothers.

People think of pastors as those who have to bring God's law to bear upon them. And indeed. we are to do so! But we bring God's law to bear because God has instructed us to proclaim His Word in ***ALL*** its truth and purity. In doing so, people are moved to repentance by the Spirit at work in that Word. It is then we do our primary task, pastors are called to dispense the mercy of God.

God is merciful to you and me through the lips of pastors. When His servants declare that sinfulness is forgiven, the merciful grace of God covers sins. At His Word, the shed blood of Christ is the merciful power that towers behind that proclamation of forgiveness. His innocent suffering and death is the merciful act of God which purchases that forgiveness spoken into your ears.

Today you will come to the table Christ sets before you. What a merciful meal this is, the most incredibly, merciful meal! Here is the body of Christ for you to eat. You take into your mouth the merciful forgiveness that He obtained with His own flesh pierced upon the tree. Here the blood of Christ is poured between your lips. This very blood was mercifully spilled unto death to purchase forgiveness and attain a place for you in His kingdom.

What is merciful? Without knowing our need for it, without knowing our sinfulness, we do not truly understand what merciful means.

Merciful is what God is toward us.

Merciful is what God makes us to be, as His love and forgiveness from his incredible mercifulness feeds us.

It is only in the mercifulness of God that we are freed to be merciful to others.

Thanks be to the merciful One, Jesus Christ, until life everlasting. Amen.