

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

The Lord teaches that men are to love one another. That love comes from God, who is Love. In that love, in response to the Divine love shown all men in Christ, men ought to be merciful. Men should not judge. Men should not condemn. Men should forgive. Men should give. All men should.

It is certainly what we would like from others. We would like others to put the best constructions on our actions. We would like them to forgive our debts and offenses, and not hold them against us. When accused, we would like to be presumed to be innocent.

When we slip up, when we do something wrong, we would like others not to jump to judgment, expose our sins, and demand punishment. We would rather they be lenient, pardoning, understanding, gracious. When we have need, we would like generosity from others, preferably without the expectation of repayment. No man desires to be indebted to another.

Be merciful. Judge not. Condemn not. Forgive. Give. But the Words of our Lord are not a directive to evaluate the actions of others. They are Words that ask us to consider ourselves, and how we show these attributes to those around us – to family, to friends, to neighbors, to coworkers, to fellow students, even to those we do not know. And if we honestly consider how we have acted, if we're honest, we must admit that the loving, merciful man our Lord describes isn't us.

We have often been quick to judge, especially when circumstances have arisen that our prejudices seize upon. We have often spoken words of condemnation. We have been slow to forgive, and often held grudges... For a long time. And we have tended not to be generous but stingy, not willing to give away what we believe we've earned or think we've deserved.

And yet the Words of our Lord are clear. His Commands are clear. His Law is clear: Be merciful. Judge not. Condemn not. Forgive. Give. It is what God demands. It is what God demands of all men. It is what God demands of each of us. It is what God demands of you. So the very things that the One who created you commands are the things most difficult, indeed, the things that are impossible for you to do from an honest heart. Therein lies the problem – in your heart, that is. You see, you live in what the Apostle calls the futility of the fallen creation.

So the same Apostle writes Words true of each of us: "For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin. For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do..." The Apostle speaks as a fallen man. He speaks for you and for me, confessing what you too have done: "For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice." "Wretched man that I am", he continues, "who will save me from this body of death?"

Be merciful. Judge not. Condemn not. Forgive. Give. It is easy for us to see when those around us fail to do what God requires. That is what the Lord calls the speck in your brother's eye. But you can't see clearly to help your brother, because you haven't always been merciful. You have at times judged. You have at times condemned. You haven't always truly forgiven. And you have failed to give selflessly.

That is the plank in your own eye. That is the sin, the trespass, that blinds you, the transgression that prevents you from being the righteous man our Lord describes. It is that sin, your sin, that makes you the blind man that falls into the ditch and leads others to do the same. It is that sin that makes you, and every fallen man, every sinner, the hypocrite our Lord condemns. And the sentence of God upon the sinner is most severe: judgment and condemnation.

The Apostle writes that the whole creation was subjected to futility, and that not willingly. But that futility is meant to turn your eyes away from yourself, and to seek help and hope outside of yourself. That futility is meant to cause you to confess that you cannot save yourself. That futility is meant to drive you to confess your need for a Savior, a merciful, forgiving, generous Savior that does not judge, that does not condemn.

The clear Word of God is meant to cause you to hope not in yourself, but rather to hope in God. For He has promised that the creation will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. And that Word of Promise is given that you receive it, place your hope in it, trust in it, believe in it. God does deliver from the bondage of corruption. He delivers you. That is His Promise. That is your hope.

Christ is the Righteous Man the Scriptures describe. It is He who is merciful, showing boundless mercy even when it was denied to Him. It is Christ who did not judge, but willingly suffered unwarranted hatred, false judgment, and unjust censure. It is Christ who died, His gibbet being fashioned from the plank in the eye of all fallen men. It is Christ who took upon Himself your sins, enduring your condemnation and judgment.

And yet it is Christ who did not condemn, but rather being sinless, allowed Himself to be covered in sin and condemned, that your sin be removed, and that you be declared innocent in Him. It is Christ who forgives, shedding His Blood that even those who crucified Him find forgiveness with God. And it is He that gives, giving up all the glory and majesty of heaven to take on Flesh, to live a life of poverty, to give even His life for you. And because of His great Gift, yours are the treasures of heaven, and a life that cannot be taken away.

It is He that delivers from the bondage of corruption, bringing you into the glorious liberty of the children of God. And He promises you that glory will be revealed in you. For it is you who have the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of which the Apostles were given the firstfruits, that as did they, you groan within yourself, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of your body.

So take heart, dear Christian. The sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in you. And this day the Lord of Love, the Lord who truly gives, blesses you with full measure – with the Paten that He fills with His Body, with the Chalice that He fills with His Blood, which streams from the Chalice and fills your soul.

You eat and drink, and in Christ God is merciful to you. In Christ you are not judged, for He has been judged in your stead. In Christ you are not condemned, you are declared holy. In Christ you are forgiven. It is you that the Lord blesses and keeps, you upon whom His face shines, you to whom He is gracious, you upon whom He lifts His countenance, and to you He gives His peace.

St. Luke 6:36-42

The Fourth Sunday after Trinity/Fifth Sunday after Pentecost, 2019 A.✠ D.

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