

Luke 6:27-38 (Seventh Sunday after the Epiphany—Series C)

“To Love and Show Mercy”

Lutheran Church of Our Redeemer, Enfield CT

February 20, 2022

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

[Jesus said:] ²⁷But I say to you who are listening, “Love your enemies; do good to those who hate you. ²⁸Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who mistreat you. ²⁹To the one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other one also. And do not withhold your tunic from the one who takes your cloak. ³⁰Give to everyone who asks you, and do not ask back from the one who takes from you. ³¹And just as you wish that people should do to you, do likewise to them. ³²And if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even the sinners love those who love them. ³³And if you do good to those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even the sinners do the same. ³⁴And if you lend money to those from whom you hope to receive it back, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners in order to receive the same back. ³⁵But love your enemies and do good and lend money expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to those who are ungrateful and evil. ³⁶Be merciful just as your Father is merciful. ³⁷And do not judge, and you shall surely not be judged. And do not condemn, and you shall surely not be condemned. Forgive and you will be forgiven. ³⁸Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, poured out will be given into your lap. For the measure which you use will be the measure you receive.”

The Gospel lesson for this Seventh Sunday after the Epiphany is the core of Jesus’ “Sermon on the Plain.” It immediately follows the blessings and the woes of last Sunday’s Gospel. We heard last week that even in the middle of our earthly poverty and hunger, sorrows and struggles, God’s blessings to us in Christ prevail for both the now and the not yet. God’s reign and rule belongs to you now—the blessings of forgiveness and eternal life. You also look forward to the not yet of salvation when you will be in glory everlasting with God in the new creation. In Baptism, you have been incorporated into Christ’s life and so the blessings of Christ have now become your inheritance.

Jesus’ preaching about the life of your discipleship continues in today’s Gospel reading when the Lord says, “But I say to you who are listening . . .” And what Jesus says is 16

statements of command which describe the life of Jesus' disciples as they share in the life of Christ as His followers by faith. We will look at these commands in three sections—Love Your Enemies, Imitate God, and Do Not Judge. What we will discover is that, as you and I share in the life of Jesus as His baptized followers, we will show love and mercy.

Jesus begins the heart of His sermon with a call to action for those who share in the life of the Savior: "Love your enemies; do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who mistreat you." These are spoken as general actions for His disciples. Jesus speaks to the group. This, then, is what the followers of Jesus by faith are to do. Love is not an emotion, but an ACTION that is expressed by doing good even to those who hate you on account of being a disciple of Jesus Christ. It is Jesus' disciples who are hated and excluded and reviled and spurned as evil on account of the Son of Man. And what does Jesus call His disciples to action to do? To love those who persecute and to do good to those hate and to bless those who curse and to pray for those who mistreat us *because* we are baptized Christians. Church liturgies from the fourth and fifth centuries, probably preserving an earlier practice, included prayers of blessing and petitions offered for heretics, those who like to cause divisions, Jews, pagans, and for all in tribulation and for the needs of the whole world. These kinds of prayers, which are still prayed from Christian altars all over the world, show how the Church loves all, even her enemies, as she stands before God and prays on their behalf.

Jesus also illustrates how an individual Christian might show love for his or her enemy. "To the one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also. And do not withhold your

tunic from the one who takes your cloak. Give to everyone who asks you, and do not ask back from the one who takes from you." Jesus is speaking again here about the results of persecution on account of faith in Him—being struck on the cheek and being deprived of the outer garment so necessary for survival in the ancient world. The Christian does the opposite of his or her natural reaction. There's no hitting back in retaliation, but the offer of the other cheek to receive the same violence. The persecutor who hates the believer so much takes away his coat! Yet the Christian is not even to struggle to hold on to his inner garment but willingly to allow the persecutor to strip him naked. The believer in Jesus might even be stripped of his property and possessions, but he should not demand back from those who take his things.

We cannot help but think here of Jesus' Passion—His suffering and death in the place of His enemies. Romans 5, "For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. . . . But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life" (Rom. 5:5-10 ESV). You and I should have suffered the full wrath of God against our sins and our sinfulness. We should have been beaten and stripped and made to suffer death and hell as the rightful punishment for our disobedience to God's Word, for our failure to love Him and our neighbors.

But in our place, Jesus was beaten and stripped, fulfilling God's promise as we read in Isaiah 50, "The Lord GOD has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious; I turned not backward. I gave my back to those who strike, and my cheeks to those who pull out the beard; I hid not my face from disgrace and spitting" (Isa. 50:5-6 ESV). Jesus was crucified in the disgrace of nakedness. He had no earthly possessions except the clothes on His back and these were taken from Him.

It is quite astounding that everything Jesus asks of His baptized disciples, He Himself did first on our behalf. He was struck but did not retaliate. He was treated violently and stripped of His clothes. Everything He had, including His life, He gave up in order to save you and me from God's wrath and punishment. On the cross, He died for our sins so that we might no longer be God's enemies. Through the waters of Holy Baptism, you and I now have received the fruits of Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection. Your sins are forgiven. You have a new life connected to Christ as your Lord and Savior. You are given God's grace to do what Christ Himself has done: to love even those who are your enemies.

Because you and I now share in the life of Jesus as His baptized disciples, we show love and mercy as we are enabled to Imitate God. God is kind to the ungrateful and evil (remember, that was you and me!) Because of His gracious favor to us through the merits of Jesus Christ, a heavenly reward and status as inheritors is what is promised to us. We are made a child of God the Most High. It was this status that we received in Holy Baptism. Now as children of the Father, baptized into Christ, we imitate His kindness by showing mercy. It's how you and I as Christians love our enemies and do good to those who hate us and lend

without expecting in return. We, by the power and grace of the Holy Spirit, become merciful. We become like Jesus and reflect His mercy to others, to our enemies, to those who hate us because of Jesus. We don't show mercy because they deserve it, but precisely because they do not. For that is what God did for you and me and so we are like our heavenly Father. We show mercy through forgiveness.

This brings us to the final section: Do Not Judge. Our Lord gives us practical examples of how mercy can be shown to others. "And do not judge, and you shall surely not be judged. And do not condemn, and you shall surely not be condemned. Forgive and you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, poured out, will be given into your lap. For the measure which you use will be the measure you receive." Judging and condemning in the context refers to the judgments of believers against unbelievers. These are judgments and condemnations about doctrine and life that are made without substantial evidence or on a faulty understanding of God's standards. In other words, these condemnations and judgments are NOT made based on the Word of God. And since Jesus' disciples represent Him, and He represents the Father, Jesus doesn't want us as His disciples to misrepresent God.

So, what God in His Word calls sin, we call sin. "Do not judge" doesn't mean we shy away from proclaiming God's Law. It is God's Law that condemns and shows sin for what it is in order that the Gospel might then lead people to repentance and saving faith in Jesus. It is through the Gospel that people receive the forgiveness of sins. Christians, then, do not judge and condemn according to any other standard than God's Word, and they do so in order that

sin might be exposed, the heart terrified of the punishment of God, and so that the heart may be comforted by the mercy extended to the person through the Gospel of the forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ. As disciples of Jesus, we love our enemies and show mercy as we imitate God, not judging except according to His Word with the purpose that we might faithfully proclaim His Law and Gospel centered in the love, mercy, and grace of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins.

To love and to be merciful to our enemies, then, is to release them from their sins in the name of Jesus through the Gospel. To love and to be merciful is to show a person his or her sin and to show the person the only Savior, Jesus, in whom there is the forgiveness of sins. This is our Christian discipleship as we share in the life of Christ through faith. By the power and grace of the Spirit through the Word of Christ, Love Your Enemies, Imitate God, and Do Not Judge according to any standard other than the Word. In this way, you show Christ's love and mercy in the forgiveness of sins to your enemies, to those who hate you, curse you, and mistreat you all on account of your faith in Jesus Christ. Amen.