

# Fourth Sunday after Trinity

St. Luke 6.36-42

July 5, 2020

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

Who are your enemies? That's the context of today's Gospel reading: the words of Jesus, "*Love your enemies.*" He repeats it, for He knows the words are difficult: "*Love your enemies.*" It's challenging enough to love—truly love—your family and friends. For what we love most is ourselves: our own desires, our own comforts, our own egos. And we subject those closest to us to our own neuroses and petty tyrannies.

"*Love your enemies*"? Hardly. We despise them. You might dress up your dislike with a slow shake of your head, a sorrowful look, but behind it is condemnation, self-justified by self-righteousness.

"*Love your enemies*"? You don't. You love yourself. So when Jesus says, "*Hypocrite!*" He's talking to you. Who are you? Last Sunday's gospel told you that: a lost sheep, a lost coin, rescued by Christ. If you're the lost sheep brought home, how can you judge your neighbor, another lost sheep no different from you?

The words of Jesus tell us to look at our enemy, and then look in the mirror and see something worse. "*Why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not perceive the plank in your own eye?*" That enemy of yours you love to hate? Her sin is a speck. Yours? A log. The image is preposterous. We've all had a speck in our eye – it's painful, but minor. A plank in your eye is something out of a *Far Side* cartoon. It means you're blind. That's who you are: blind, not seeing your own sin.

The only sinner you need to be concerned about is yourself.

Now there is an exception. It's where God has made you a judge. Then you must judge. If you are in an office of authority, like parents or police, then exercise that authority with justice.

If God has not given you the authority and command to judge, then forget about what others do. Joseph said to his brothers in our first reading, "*Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God?*" How could Joseph refuse to forgive his repentant brothers? That is what Jesus speaks of today – a refusal to forgive, and thus making ourselves out to be God.

The Eighth Commandment shows us what the godly life looks like: defending others, speaking well of them, explaining everything in the kindest way.

What then is our Lord's counsel? Look at yourself in the mirror of the law; concentrate upon your own sin; then, you won't notice the speck in your brother's eye.

It is true: people hurt us. At some point, it starts to feel like we are being taken advantage of. How long do I have to put up with this? I should just leave: leave the relationship, leave the family, leave the church. I'm done being hurt.

That concern is what prompts St. Peter to ask Jesus how often we should forgive a brother or sister who sins against us. Seven times? No, seventy times seven. It's not for us to count, but to realize that with God's forgiveness—and so also ours—there is no counting.

Although He had every right to judge them, Jesus submitted even to the unjust violence of Jews and Romans. He prayed for them, and for us, when He said, "*Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.*"

Joseph also prefigures our Lord, when he comforts his brothers. Think of it! These are the brothers who cast him into a pit, tore his clothes, sold him

into slavery, and declared him dead to their father. After the death of Jacob their father, these same brothers come, fearful Joseph will now take revenge. Wouldn't he have the right? But Holy Scripture says, *"He comforted them and spoke kindly to them."*

That's what a disciple of Jesus does. How can we sing, *"Make atonement for our sins, O Lord,"* and not see our brother or sister covered by the same atonement?

The words, *"Be merciful,"* are not the means of our salvation but the result of it. Knowing mercy in Jesus makes the disciple of Jesus merciful; or, as St. John puts it, *"We love because He first loved us."* God's mercy is the ground of our faith; our mercy is the fruit of our faith. Article VI of the Augsburg Confession teaches us, *"It is also taught among us that such faith should produce good fruits and good works and that we must do all such good works as God has commanded, but we should do them for God's sake and not place our trust in them."* Those good works can all be summed up in these two words of Jesus: *"Be merciful."*

So that is the life of faith. Is it hard? Certainly. To beat back your anger and resentment, to squelch your pride, and not judge, may be one of the crosses you have to bear, as our Lord molds you into the Christian He wants you to be. Dr. Luther once said, *"When a Christian suffers injustice at the hands of his neighbor, he should say, I see a splinter in his eye, but if I look into the mirror, I see in my own eyes planks large enough to build several hog troughs"* [House Postil, Trinity IV, First Sermon].

All our sinful judging, and the judgement we deserve – it's all been laid on Jesus, who was judged for our offenses. Approach the altar of judgment, we hear the verdict of Jesus: *"Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins."* That is now God's judgment on you. And it's the judgment the disciple gives to his neighbors. +INJ+

*The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*