

Sermon Trinity 4 2020

July 5, 2020

Luke 6:36-42

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. This morning we meditate on the Gospel Lesson previously read.

“You can’t judge me. Only God can judge me. Only God knows my heart.” You probably have heard people say that common refrain. Or they’ll comment about Jesus even saying not to judge. “Jesus said not to judge, so don’t do it.” And are those statements true? They are, aren’t they? We can’t open someone’s brain and know their intentions, we can’t look beyond the surface and see what the attitude of their heart is, can we? Of course we can’t. But what’s the meaning intended when someone says this? They often mean that you can’t tell them that they’re doing something wrong. You can’t tell them that some action that they are taking is something they shouldn’t be doing. Or maybe it’s used with regard to something else, like how the pope recently said with regard to homosexuality, “who am I to judge?”

As we hear our Lord’s injunction this morning by which He says, “**Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven,**” what does He mean? Does He mean that we can’t comment as to whether something is right or wrong? Does He mean that we can’t say that people shouldn’t be doing things, shouldn’t be committing a certain action?

I think we know the answer to that on some level. I think as we look at the way our society as a whole has drifted so far from the intent that our Lord has for us in so many ways, we know on some level that we still have to be able to call things wrong and right. For example, as the Church we speak to a sexual ethic and the call our Lord makes to His people that sex be reserved for the marriage bed between husband and wife. And we can support the benefit of this as we see how things like depression and mental illness have increased significantly in a culture where this has been ignored. Or how we see how many of the mass shooters in the past few years have come from homes without fathers—and the answer to that is nearly all of them. When we look at things like this, then we realize there is necessity to speak to whether things are wrong or right, don’t we? In fact, this is exemplified by the fact that our society as a whole still agrees that killing is wrong. We know that on some level this can’t outright mean that we can’t say that things aren’t right or wrong.

So, what does it mean then? Look at what Jesus says later in the passage. He says, “**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."

You see, the key is understanding this word "hypocrite." When you speak about these things, don't do so as a hypocrite. So, as I like to say, let's ask the Lutheran question about that, "Was ist Das? What does this mean?"

To start with the word itself hypocrite, it has its earliest known origins relating to a definition of explaining or interpreting something. It's from the same root as judgment, which isn't really here or there for our discussion, but that connects to this old definition. What does relate is that you can see that the definition over time evolves to describe actors. Actors interpreted lines on stage and so they were hypocrites. However, this word was eventually applied to those who acted not on stage, but in their lives. Hypocrites as we understand them, people who might say one thing and do another. Or people who might hold themselves to one standard, but other people to another.

In fact, think about how Jesus uses the word elsewhere. It really fits that, doesn't it? For example, as I was studying the definition, the dictionary I use for studying words for sermons pointed out that you could see Jesus using the word in Luke chapter 13. In that example, Jesus is teaching in a synagogue on the Sabbath. As He was teaching, He saw a woman with what Luke calls "a disabling spirit." Something had afflicted this woman so that she couldn't stand straight, but could only remain bent over. In fact, he tells us she had been that way for eighteen years. And what did Jesus do? He healed her. Right there and then, He said to her, "**Woman, you are freed from your disability.**" And because Jesus' Word carries His authority, that Word does what it says, as He also laid His hands on her, she was healed.

Now as I started that story, I mentioned that this was the Sabbath. As Lutherans, you might recall we don't make a big deal about resting on the Sabbath. I've made this point before, but this is because Jesus is our Sabbath Rest, and so we understand the Third Commandment to keep the Sabbath Holy to mean that we "Fear and love God so that we do not despise preaching and His Word, but hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it." In other words, this means that not only hold His Word in esteem, but the public preaching of it, we hold the public worship in high esteem. But in the Old Testament, the Command clearly still stood that this meant that you rest. In fact, the Pharisees and the leaders of Jesus' time had calculated just how much work you could do and still observe the Command. They figured out how many steps you could take, they figured out how much effort you could put into things, and they figured out what you could and couldn't do. And what couldn't you do? You couldn't heal. And you can see that in this story. You can see

it because the ruler of the synagogue becomes angry and says, **“There are six days in which work ought to be done. Come on those days and be healed, and not on the Sabbath day.”**

And how does Jesus respond? **“You hypocrites!”** You see He knows their hearts. He knows that they might show the appearance of caring for the commandment, but they don't. They might even think that they are truly defending God's Command and honor here. But they're not. How do we know? He continues, **“You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger and lead it away to water it? And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath day?”** In other words, He's saying, “You are OK with watering your animals on the Sabbath, why shouldn't this human, this child of God, be treated with greater regard?!”

In our day, this might be akin to the accusations I've seen where people point out the hypocrisy of saying that Black Lives Matter, but not caring that abortion kills far more Black Americans than any other form of maltreatment of the Black Community. And lest we be hypocritical, it's also akin to the accusation that we as Christians claim to be pro-life and don't care more for those who are in need and choose not to abort their babies. That's not to say that we don't do some, or even a lot, but the Law always convicts us in the reality that we could or should do more.

And so, there we see how Jesus speaks of these men as hypocrites. In a sense, it's a lack of consistency, as we often think of it. We could also say that for Jesus it's using the commands of God as a checklist and a way to justify ourselves. In a sense we could say that Jesus applies this just like we spoke of the Elder Son last week in the story of the Prodigal Son. That son used the obedience to the commands of the father as a way to check off how good he was, to pat himself on the back in comparison to the younger, brother, that sinner.

And with that we could even say what I think is the essence of what Jesus is saying here. When He speaks of not judging, He's saying that when we speak of right and wrong, we do so with mercy. He's saying that when we deal with wrong doing, we don't do it in such a way that reflects the self-righteousness of the Elder Brother last week. No instead, it should be like how Joseph spoke to his brothers.

I always say how that's one of my favorite things in Scripture. There's Joseph who went through all kinds of suffering, a type of hell, and was brought back. And he could have been bitter to his brothers as they caused it, but what does he do? He “comforted” them, he “spoke to them kindly.” What does he say? He says, “don't worry. **As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many**

people should be kept alive.” You see, he understood God’s mercy here. He understood that our God is the God who does not create evil, but as we create it continually in our sinful actions, He still uses it to accomplish His good. Joseph understood about God what we would see fully realized in Christ. That as we as sinful people would rebel against God, that as we would go so far as to accomplish the worst possible thing in killing the sinless man, the Son of God, the person of the Christ, God would accomplish the greatest possible good: the salvation of mankind.

Christians, there you see what Jesus speaks of when He says, **“Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap.”** It doesn’t matter how many trials and tribulations you experience. It doesn’t matter if our suffering with coronaviruses—or now we’re hearing of possible swine flus—it doesn’t matter if those would keep us locked away till our death. It doesn’t matter should we be oppressed by tyrannical governments or groups. It doesn’t matter because God is still faithful. God is still merciful. God, in Christ has still given to you good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, put in your lap.

You can picture that with a measuring cup, right? You see this comes from the marketplace. It’s the mark of a generous seller. You put the grain, or the flour in. You push it down. You shake it out till it’s running over, running over into the folds of the cloth of the robes of the buyer so that he gets as much as possible; so that one cup is actually two, but only one is charged for.

Your cup runs over as He baptized you into the merciful death of Jesus and His joyous resurrection. Your cup runs over as He feeds you His body and gives you the cup of His blood pouring over with His mercy and forgiveness. Your cup runs over as He gives and gives to you mercy, each morning, each afternoon, each day. The sacrifice of the cross for your sins, delivered to you in generosity unheeded.

So how do we deal with this question of addressing right and wrong so as to not be hypocrites? We still call wrong wrong. We still call right right. But we apply it most of all to ourselves. And when we must apply it to others, we do so as gently, as understandingly as possible. Knowing that we deserve the same condemnation we might want to express to them. Knowing that we are just as broken as they, and we aren’t better than them, but that we want them to see their sin, not to feel bad, but to know this outpouring of Jesus’s mercy. That’s not easy to do. It’s only something we can do by grace. So we shouldn’t rush to do it. Instead, we should always rush to Jesus as He gives us from His mercy and grace generously with such a measure. Amen.