

Sermon Trinity 4 2021

June 27, 2021

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, especially the words, **“Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.”**

Scripture doesn't tell us what Joseph's brothers were thinking about as Jacob lay there approaching death. It's clear in the blessings that Jacob bestows on his family right before this that they all knew the time was coming, but what were the brothers thinking? How did the topic first come up, this worry that they had? Obviously it weighed on them, and had for a while. My study bible timeline estimates that Jacob was brought to Egypt in about 1876 BC and died in about 1859, so that's 17 years or so. Who knows just how long it was, but it's a while, right? And all this time the brothers haven't forgotten. You wonder who brought it up? Was it Reuben who first argued Joseph shouldn't be killed, or Judah who agreed and suggested sending him to slavery? “Brothers, our father is dying, and we deserve Joseph's wrath. If you remember, I didn't want to kill him, it was you guys, but now, what if with Father dying, he's also planning to kill us?” Or perhaps it was something that still burdened the conscience of one of the other brothers, Asher, or Gad, or Levi? That sort of guilt can stick around, can't it?

And you can imagine the worry when the day finally came that Jacob did die. It's not for sure, but it sort of seems that this approach to come to Joseph is contrived, is made up, isn't it? Maybe Jacob really did say that, maybe he really did tell the boys to make sure Joseph didn't harm them, and to let Joseph know that was Jacob's own wish. Maybe, he told them that if they thought Joseph was acting suspiciously to do so. We don't know for sure, but it sure seems like an attempt out of desperation. An attempt, like I said flowing from those burdened consciences—which makes sense because sin really does do a number on our conscience. Because the reality is that sin deserves wrath, it deserves justice. Doesn't it? It deserves payback.

Even the Law makes this point, doesn't it? Look at what Moses tells the people in Leviticus, **“Whoever takes a human life shall surely be put to death... If anyone injures his neighbor, as he has done it shall be done to him, fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth; whatever injury he has given a person shall be given to him.”** Sin puts that rift between our God and us, separates us from the Tree of Life, so it deserves death in kind. And that burdens us, or to look back at Joseph and his brothers, they'd thrown him into the pit where the Midianites were able to steal him

out and sell him into the slavery—just like Judah had suggested, but without the brothers getting the benefit of the sale. But they'd thrown him down there. Would Joseph throw them in a pit? Would he enslave them? Would he just be done with it and kill them? Who knows, but they were worried, weren't they? **"It may be that Joseph will hate us and pay us back for all the evil that we did to him."** And so they come to him with this request of Jacob—which to be fair, even though I'm contending that it was made up, I'm sure it's what Jacob would have wanted. **"Your father gave this command before he died: 'Say to Joseph, 'Please forgive the transgression of your brothers and their sin, because they did evil to you.' ' And now, please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father."** And you can imagine the anxiety as they waited. Anxiety deserved, anxiety stewed by these pricked consciences.

But what did Joseph do? It's so telling isn't it? There's no anger. There's no question as to what will happen. There's no doubt in Joseph's mind what he'll do. He knows the God who is gracious and merciful. As he tells them, **"Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? 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, as they are today. So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones. Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? 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, as they are today. So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones."** And so Moses says, **"Thus he comforted them and spoke kindly to them."**

Yes, Joseph knew God's wisdom. He was able to look back and see how hard things were, but how the Lord had brought this great good out of it. Even the evil of these brothers, even their jealous, selfish sin. Even that God had brought good out of it. And so, Joseph showed mercy.

Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful. Such words for us to hear and understand. And we see it in the story of Joseph. We see the example he sets for us in it. Has someone harmed you, offended you, abused you? **Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.**

Of course, this story isn't merely an example, it's a picture too. Sure, a picture as we are supposed to live our lives as a picture, a picture representing to the world our God in His graciousness. But it shows us that graciousness too before God Himself revealed it in Christ. But that cross is where we see it the most. On that cross, the evil that the world did was met not with evil returned. No, on that cross, the evil of the

perfect man, God in the flesh, the One who never sinned and never did anything deserving death, or pain, or suffering, that One was nailed to the tree and murdered. And of course, Jesus knew it was coming. He knew the scourging, the beating, the piercing. He knew it all would be borne on His body. And He knew that the Father would use that, and use His death, this death at the hands of sinful, evil men, for something even greater. He knew that this would be the time when the Father Himself would pour out the justice deserved against sin.

All of that guilt Joseph's brothers bore on their consciences, all that their consciences told them they deserved, that and more was poured on Christ. And the same goes for your conscience. All that it tells you your sin deserves, all the guilt that you try to bury in there, all of the sins that you hide and pretend don't exist. The wrath those deserve was poured on this Christ. Why? Because this evil that we intend, our God is so good, so merciful, He brings good out of it. And so having poured out the wrath on the One who didn't deserve it, He raised His Son showing that death, the consequence of sin, that death couldn't hold Him. Why not? Because that sin had been forgiven. Because that is just how merciful this God is.

Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful. As we live in this world, that's a hard thought, isn't it? **Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.** Everything from the earliest days of our lives tells us to repay evil for evil, to demand justice, to pour out our wrath in vengeance against those who harm us. But as we read these lessons for today, we see what this means, **Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.** We see how it plays itself out.

Look at how Jesus tells you to do it, **“Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; 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.”** If you are gracious to others, grace will be shown to you. Now, it's worth making the point in our day, does this mean that we shouldn't have police, or we shouldn't arrest people for crimes and have punishments for them? By no means. We can see this in places that have put policies in place reflecting that mindset. From stories I have read online, there are a lot storeowners in California really suffering because of this. The laws have been amended such that shoplifting amounting to less than something like \$1,500 will not be prosecuted. Apparently it's ruining small business owners. Is that what this means? That the state has no authority to do this?

No, but it means that you forgive as an individual. It means that when someone takes from you, you show them mercy, you don't condemn them, you forgive them.

To continue in this passage, it means that when that happens to you, you don't look at the speck in their eye, but you see the log in your own, that you remember the Christ who died for your sins. In fact, this is the only way to be able to do those things. We could even connect it to the story of the Prodigal Son last week, where I made the point that this love of the Father, this love and mercy of God is so certain it frees us to see the immensity of our sin. It frees us to acknowledge the logs that our in our eye, to see them for just how big they are—that they are rafters like you see on the ceiling, not just small logs. It also frees us to know how to begin to live as Paul describes in the lesson from his letter to the Romans.

I don't know about you, but some of the things Paul says there are tall orders, aren't they? Of course, he is only mirroring things our Lord Jesus has already said, but what he says there: **“Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.... associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. Repay no one evil for evil... live peaceably with all... never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God... if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink... Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”** How are those even possible?

Because you know the mercy of our God. Because you know that your sin has been atoned for. Because you know that as Christ suffered for all sins, He is even making right those sins that have been enacted against you, those sins that harmed you. As I mentioned the conscience, I've said it before, but even those sins against us taint our consciences. But the blood of Christ cleanses that. I don't know if you recall what Peter says about baptism, but he makes the point in his first letter. In chapter three there, he says that baptism, **“now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”** Lest your conscience be burdened, He promises it has been cleansed in the blood of Christ poured out over you in your baptism. And He continues to pour it out to you in the holy chalice of Christ's blood, His body and blood fed to you in His Supper.

Christians, this is mercy upon mercy upon mercy. **Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.** For He has been merciful to you, and in Christ, He promises He will continue to do so, even unto eternity. Amen.