

## Sermon for Trinity 4 – Luke 6:36-42

In the Name of the Father and of the Son ✠ and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

There are teachings in the Scriptures that the world neither wants to hear nor to understand. For example, keeping oneself pure ... being humble and showing humility... and trusting by faith and not by sight. But on the other hand, there are teachings in the Scriptures that the world approves and praises, if only in their own mistaken way. One example is mercy. Everyone should take on his neighbor's need. We should help each other in times of trouble or danger and the like. We're supposed to believe that the world is full of mercy and man's goodwill to others. Truth be told, we do see glimpses of this, but the natural man, the non-Christian, does not understand and cannot achieve God's mercy: the "Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful" type of mercy, that is.

Indeed, there is a natural mercy which bears some external fruits. It's good as far as external natural mercy goes. The Oprah Winfreys, Brad Pitts, Matt Damons, and Major League Baseball's Stand Up 2 Cancer have done much to help the fellow man in this way.

But it's still completely different from the mercy God requires. "Be merciful" is only half of the verse. We must also know: "even as your Father is merciful." That's a lot to live up to. But these words also show us that only Christians who know God's mercy by faith in Jesus Christ can show true mercy to others. In order to be merciful, we must know, receive, and believe God's mercy. This comes about only by humbling ourselves in acknowledging our sins and not deceiving ourselves. And finally receiving God's forgiveness found in His Word and Sacraments.

"Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful." That's the encouragement we receive from today's Gospel. But it's impossible for us to follow this teaching if we don't go to the source of all mercy: God's mercy. Our Father is Who we are supposed to be like. And we are children of God who have experienced our heavenly Father's mercy. Where do we see it? In God's greatest gifts for us: in Holy Baptism, when we were dead in sin, God mercifully made us His children by no merit of our own. In Absolution, God again mercifully grants us full pardon and forgiveness. In the Sacrament of the Altar, when He mercifully unites us with Himself in His Body and Blood for the forgiveness of sins. Indeed, in these we see that the steadfast mercy of the Lord endures forever.

But in spite of God's goodness, our hearts remain selfish, cold, harsh, and cruel. How can we ever become merciful, gentle, patient, and loving? How can we change? Only God's mercy can make us sinners into His children in Christ.

So when we confess our sins, as we do in this place – when we grieve and are ashamed of our sins – and afterward, when we have received forgiveness in the Gospel and have heard that God loves us for Christ's sake and wants to have us as His dear children, then we can rightly say, "Mercy has come to me." Then, even our selfish, cold, and cruel hearts are melted. Harshness and faultfinding must be put behind us. We are humbled and acknowledge our own guilt. We see the log in our own eye. We see others as fellow sinners who need God's mercy just as we do. We see that all have a daily need God's mercy.

Think of what it would be like for us if God looked at us with the eye of judgement and not the eye of a merciful Father. If He brought our hidden sins before the light of His face and judged us accordingly. At that moment, our joy in judging others would come to an end. Whoever among us delights in disparaging the good in others, whoever among us wants to put the worst construction on everything, whoever among us seeks out and wants to believe all kinds of evil and vicious rumors about others, whoever among us wants to spread other people's shame and eagerly listen to such things – we prove that we don't know our great need for God's mercy, nor do we give His mercy to others.

“Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.” If we remember this, we will not shame others, much less condemn them, as though we could read other people's hearts. We won't want to avenge ourselves and repay evil for evil; instead, we will forgive and show grace. Our eyes will be open so that when we see a need we want to give joyfully as a child of God who has everything we need by God's mercy. We don't give for the sake of a reward, and yet the reward of grace is promised to us: “Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap.” We give not to flatter ourselves ... Not as hypocrites to deceive ourselves, thinking we're doing something for God, for He is able to work even in spite of our small and feeble gifts.

Some people think that when they withhold forgiveness from a neighbor whose wronged them, this is for their neighbor's good. Many people deal with someone who's hurt them in such a way that they make him more callous and more bitter than he was before. Let this not be done among us. “Can a blind man lead a blind man? Will they both not fall into a pit?” You will not win your neighbor with harshness, unkindness, and judgement when he is at odds with you. Sin resides deep in each of our hearts. We're fooling ourselves if we think we can look down on our neighbor and still win him over. “Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice that 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 that log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take out the speck that is in your brother's eye.” If we forget what we ourselves are before God, then we deceive ourselves, and the log remains in us.

We must look at ourselves honestly. Then we can honestly acknowledge what we are before God, not just on the outside, but in our innermost heart, in our thoughts, in our words, and in our desires. It's not good. In confessing this and receiving God's merciful forgiveness, then we will be merciful in our judgement toward our neighbor. If we see that he needs help and guidance, if we see that he is in danger, then we speak to him and show him that it's the Father's mercy that motivates us, not blind arrogance and faultfinding. Little by little, we will become merciful as our Father in heaven is merciful, who sent His Son to the wood of the cross so that every log and speck may be removed from our eyes and we see clearly only His love, mercy, and forgiveness for us. Amen.

The Peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. ✠BJF✠