

SERMON FOR TRINITY IV – JUNE 27, 2021 – LUKE 6:36-42

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

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

³⁶ Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful. ³⁷ Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven; ³⁸ 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." ³⁹ He also told them a parable: "Can a blind man lead a blind man? Will they not both fall into a pit? ⁴⁰ A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher. ⁴¹ 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? ⁴² 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.

"Judge not, lest ye be judged." This might be one of the most misquoted Scriptures in our broader society today. Quoting this seems to get one off scot-free, and seems to justify just about any aberrant behavior one can imagine. From abortion to euthanasia to same-sex marriage to pornography, we are supposed to just live and let live; whatever someone else does in their life, we aren't supposed to intervene whatsoever. And, when we do try to speak the truth to them, that without repentance, their behavior is abhorrent to God, deserving of eternal condemnation without His absolution, we are labeled as bigots, judgmental and horrible people, only interested in condemning others; instead, we are concerned for their eternal salvation. Especially when it comes to sins against the sixth

commandment, which God has told us Himself is one of the most important because it involves sins against our own bodies, the temple of the Holy Spirit that He has created in His image, we are to not sit back and allow folks to continue on without speaking out against the wrongdoing we know is a big deal.

Now, of course, we are told throughout Scripture that we are to speak the truth IN LOVE to our erring brother. This love doesn't mean that we don't speak, but that we do so in a tactful way, seeking to restore him to full fellowship with God and His church. We don't want to alienate him further! However, we can't refrain from speaking forever – the time comes when we have built a rapport with him, that we have to use this to our advantage, and hopefully win him over from his sinful lifestyle. But, in the world in which we live, this is often misconstrued, and folks often listen to other influences besides that of God and the Scriptures for guidance on living their lives. That creates a challenge that only the Holy Spirit can overcome, to guide us in what to say, how to say it, and giving us the opportunity to say it that will be most helpful to our brother.

So, why is this passage so misunderstood. Much like our discussion last week about the Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin, it's because we're content to settle for a superficial, face-value reading of the text, without ascertaining the context of Jesus' words, nor of the impact of what He was saying to the crowds. We think that we can just take these words, that were given in the form of a parable, and directly draw from them what we think that they mean. But, Jesus was clear that He spoke in parables for a reason – to hide His true meaning from some, so that they wouldn't understand for a time. He speaks about the kingdom of heaven, and what it's going to be like – it's going to be completely different from the world in which we live. Let's delve into Jesus' words a little bit here, and see what he's driving at.

Just what does the word "judge" mean? Judging CAN mean that we are being self-righteous, thanking God that we aren't nearly as off the tracks as the obviously sinful and wayward brother. This is indeed what Jesus is saying SHOULDN'T be our attitude. Rather, we are to be humble, remember that

but for the grace of God go I, and seek to help our brother that is in mortal danger, rather than just pointing out his sin in order to make ourselves feel better about ourselves and our own lives. We aren't to keep a record of how much or how well we've kept God's Law; rather, we give thanks to Him that He has redeemed us by His blood and righteousness on the cross of Calvary. Except for Him, we'd be in the same pit as the man that is living in obvious, abject sin. This judgment can come from a place where we think that there is some semblance of a plan to get into heaven because we've kept some of God's Laws – He wants to make it apparent that there is absolutely no hope for us in this way. Think of the rest of the Sermon on the Mount – that's why Jesus makes it seem so impossible to keep His Law – SO THAT WE WON'T RELY ON IT. It's not just about keeping the Ten Commandments, but it's about keeping even the spirit of them

For example: We don't just have to not kill our brother, we also have to avoid wishing him harm – otherwise, we've already committed murder against him in our heart. Also for example: We don't just have to refrain from committing physical, sexual immorality with our brother's wife, we also have to avoid sinful, carnal thoughts about his wife, or lusting after her in our heart – otherwise, it's just as if we've already gone through with the sinful action.

In our text, Jesus reminds us that we are not to have judgmental thoughts, or take any delight in our brother falling into sin. We aren't to try to make hay off of the fact that we think that we're somehow better than him because our sins are more hidden than his; that's the judging that Jesus is talking about. In the same way, Jesus expands upon the definition of terms here – He wants to have a clear definition of judgment, condemnation and forgiveness. He's smoking out any tendency on our part to try to self-justify ourselves, or think that there's some way for us to get to heaven based upon our adherence to the law. Let me be clear – there is NO WAY for us to keep the Law of God perfectly; if we think that there is, then we are mistaken!

Judging also CAN mean that we are judging our brother's actions AND OUR OWN against God's righteous standard, trying to keep the Law of God because it pleases Him, and not because we're trying to earn enough tallies in heaven to get in on our own. Good judging is being familiar enough with the Word of God to talk to our brother, remind him of his sin, just like the prophet Nathan did with King David – that there are consequences for grossly sinful behavior, and that God will deal with them if they are not repented of with a true heart. Good judging is keeping ourselves from the same sin as our brother, rather than being drawn down into the fires of hell with him. It's easy to start justifying our own sin, thinking that we're not as bad as our brother. Sooner rather than later, and it's a slippery slope, we're doing what he's doing, and getting ourselves into greater and greater shame and vice. Our sinful nature loves sin, and loves to justify sin. The evil one tries to get us to cast doubt upon the Word of God, "Did God really say..." worked in the Garden of Eden, and works with us today. So, the main determiner of good versus bad judging is the motivation. Are we trying to justify ourselves against our seeming standard of others, or are we actually trying to help our brother to confess his sin and receive God's absolution?

That's where the second part of this parable comes in – the part about the speck and the plank. A healthy attitude for us to take when we find our brother sinning greatly is to first examine ourselves, confess our many sins, and receive God's absolution for them. Having trouble identifying sins in your own life? As Luther says, pinch yourself, because if you really can't find any sins in your own life, or desires to sin, then you might be dead, and in the perfection of heavenly glory. If the pinch hurts, then there are sins to discover – you're still alive! We need to make sure that our theological radar is working properly, so that we recognize what is sin and what is not. Often when we're dealing with our brother, we are easily sucked into the sin that afflicts him, and we end up justifying and making excuses for him, all in an attempt to not place a friendship on the line.

It's only when we are seeing clearly, when we realize that we are sinners ourselves, through and through, that we have the correct vision to see to take the speck out of our brother's eye. Seeing correctly in this case involves having the proper perspective on judging that we talked about earlier, with the interest in bringing the brother back to full fellowship, rather than making ourselves look better at his expense. That's why we live lives in view of our baptism; lives of daily repentance and forgiveness; thankfulness for the fact that we are renewed, we are strengthened, we are enabled to continue on because our sins are forgiven by God forever. That's how we avoid being brought down into the pit of sin, or bringing others down with us – this healthy, life-giving style of living. We DAILY confess our sins and our sinfulness; we receive God's holy absolution on a regular basis, either in the form of the corporate absolution in church, or in private absolution with the pastor for those sins that trouble us the most

A parallel passage to this understanding of Godly judging, as opposed to sinful moral comparing, can be found in Ezekiel Chapter 37 – we have an obligation to speak the truth to those who we find that are living in abject sin. We are to not remain silent if we see someone living in obvious, outwardly sinful ways. We are to speak the truth to them, so that they have clearly heard the truth of God's Word in their particular situation. However, the responsibility to convert the heart is not ours; that belongs to God the Holy Spirit. If we speak the truth, and it doesn't register with our brother, then our obligation ends – we've spoken, and he's chosen to disregard. But, if we don't speak at all, then the onus is upon us, because we did not speak. Far from being a cautionary tale about never judging the actions of another believer in the faith, Ezekiel speaks once again about the motivation and the actions that we take, and how we do them.

The greatest need in the church, indeed, among sinful mankind, is being made righteous in the sight of God, and having our sins forgiven and forgotten by Him forever. Everything else pales in comparison, because this greatest need is what is necessary for us to be ushered into heavenly glory

when we die, instead of being condemned to the fires of hell. We can have all of the esteem of our fellow men, we can think that we've lived the most spotless, peerless life, we can think that we've achieved holiness before God on our own, but these boasts fall short in a blink of an eye. We are all sinful and unclean men, hopeless without the work of Christ on our behalf on the cross of Calvary.

However, just because we are sinful and completely corrupted, this doesn't mean that we throw God's righteous standards out the window. We have the hope that we will be made righteous by the Holy Spirit working in our hearts, and that His re-creating work will be completed once we get to heaven. In the meantime, He gradually and steadily makes us more and more into His image and likeness, by His power and His action within our sinful, sin-filled selves.

We might be tempted to take Jesus' words here, and think that we aren't to point out the sin of our brother; instead, focus on ourselves, and our brother can take care of himself. Or, that we are somehow compounding our sin if we point out that without repentance, our brother is destined for the fires of hell. Our society tells us that we are being judgmental, holier-than-thou, even "intolerant" of other lifestyles, which is the most serious rejoinder that we can be painted with in our post-modern, post-Christian society.

However, our Scripture reading for today tells us differently. We aren't trying to earn anything for ourselves, or improve our standing, by pointing out sin. Rather, we're sincerely concerned for the spiritual health of our brother in the faith. Showing love to him might seem to take the form of letting him do what he wants, and giving him complete autonomy. However, if we know that what he is doing is going to get him into deep trouble, and maybe even dull his theological radar to the point of extinguishing his faith, we have a duty to speak. We do this speaking of the truth IN LOVE, that is, tactfully, using the building blocks of a relationship that we've already built with him over days and years. But sometimes speak we must, always being mindful of our own sinful natures, and the fact that we're no better than he is just because we're able to hide our sins more skillfully.

Thanks be to God that He continues to lead and guide us through this Scripture. He gives us the tools to dig deeper into His original meaning, which is much deeper than just be superficially nice to each other. How is it being nice to someone to allow them to continue in unrepentant sin, where the only result will be worse than negative – it's death forever! The Holy Spirit promises to lead and guide us, to give us the words to say and the opportunities to say them, so that we will not be self-righteous, but righteous guides for our brother in need. Jesus has truly done everything for our salvation. Amen.

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

Now may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Savior and Lord. Amen.