

Sermon: 4th Sunday after Trinity

Text: Luke 6:36-42: “Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.”

Theme: Mercy

Goal: To be as merciful to others as God is to us in Christ

Dear Friends,

Introduction: Can we be as merciful to our brother, or even to our enemies, as God is merciful to us? It seems to be an impossible task. But this is what Jesus requires from us as God’s children. How can we handle this text? Shall we try it using our own strength? Shall we give up because it is impossible? Shall we ignore it because it is a too high standard for us?

I – God’s mercy

Luther wrote about this text: *Now everyone knows quite well that the term “merciful” describes a person who is ready to sympathize with his fellowman, a person who is kind and friendly toward his fellowman and so genuinely concerned about his needs and misfortunes of soul and body, reputation and property, that he tries to think of ways in which he might be able to help his fellowman, and prove his concerns by his deeds, doing them joyfully and gladly. That is what “being merciful” means. But Jesus pointedly says, “as your Father also is merciful”.* (Quoted by Phil

Brandt, p.1, from *Sermons of Martin Luther: The House Postils* Vol 2. Ed.: Eugene Klug. Baker, 1996. Pp. 258-268)

God’s mercy was shown in a very special way when He sympathized with us in such a manner that He literally put Himself in our shoes, becoming one of us in Christ. All His life was a life of mercy upon His people, helping the sick and the poor, helping the rich and the scholars in their meaningless life, receiving sinners into His fellowship, giving attention to the women, taking children on His lap.

But not only His deeds of mercy upon people of His time have to be mentioned. His biggest work of mercy was done on the cross, when He offered Himself to suffer and to be killed on our behalf due to our sins. He was me and you dying on the cross. What was necessary to pay for our sins, was done. No condemnation anymore! We are free from our sins and from the eternal jail. Jesus' resurrection confirmed that there is life, a new life not only for Him, but for us also, as He did everything on our behalf. Remember: He was in our place! His mercy was so complete that He won eternal life for us and He opened the door of His Father's home to us, so that we can enter there as His beloved children. Do you believe it? I'm sure you believe. By Gods' mercy, all that belongs to Jesus is now ours! We can enjoy the status of children of God and rejoice in the hope to live in His house for all eternity! Is this not enough to show how merciful our Father is to us? So, "be merciful, just as your Father is merciful."

II – God's mercy and our mercy

On the one hand, this text shows how weak we are. We cannot be so merciful as God is. We cannot die for the sins of our fellow as Jesus died for the sins of all. *Christ sets up the high ideal of perfect love – not that we can fully attain it in this life. Thus, however, is God's high standard for us* (CSSB Matt 6:48). In that sense, this text is a hard Law to us and depresses us. We are not able to be merciful like our Father and we will never reach this goal. This puts us down in our proud. We have to confess: I can't; I'm a sinner.

On the other hand, this text shows God's mercy on us. We need Him. Without Him we are lost. We depend on Him and we rely on Him. Therefore, we pray when we confess our sins: *I, a poor sinner, confess to you all my sins... and I pray to you, that by your*

infinite mercy... you be gracious and merciful to me. And little later we sing: Lord, have mercy on us. Christ, have mercy on us. Lord, have mercy on us. And we go back home in peace, forgiven, because we believe in God's mercy in Christ according to His promises. Now, "be merciful, just as your Father is merciful."

III – Our mercy and our fellow

The comfortable fool who assumes that God's love means he/she is secure in grace and needs to do nothing needs to be made uncomfortable by this passage (Phil Brandt, p. 53). Luther is very harsh in his sermon about those who enjoy the mercy of God, but don't want to be merciful to their fellows. He wrote: *Before you came to faith, God did not deal with you according to what you deserved, but according to His grace. He led you to accept His Word and promised you forgiveness of sins. That was the first level on which we were measured, as faith was begun in us. Now, because we received such measure from God, He says to us, Remember, measure in the same way with other people. If you refuse, then you will experience what you mete out to others. If you have no compassion on them, I will have none for you. If you judge and condemn them, I will likewise judge and condemn you. You strip them of everything, I will do so to you and leave you with nothing. This is measuring in accordance with faith, because our dear Lord Jesus considers the deeds we do to our fellowmen so seriously, that He will recall whatever good things He has given us previously, if we refuse to do good to our fellowman.*

Luther wrote more: *Your faith is genuine when you do unto your neighbor as your Father in heaven has done to you. Our dear Lord Jesus Christ is here preaching to all counterfeit Christians. They enjoy sermons about grace and the forgiveness of sins, that the*

Father in heaven for the sake of his Son, Jesus Christ, suspended judgment condemnation, death and hell... and now, instead, has given grace, life, salvation, good conscience, and the kingdom of heaven without our merit or work. Such a sermon, I say, the pseudo-Christians like to hear; but that they, in turn should show mercy, love, compassion, friendliness, and every kindness, with that they will have nothing to do.

That is why we must preach to such pseudo-Christians and say, it is true, God out of pure grace has forgiven all guilt and trespass... On the other hand, you should also know that... He nevertheless demands interest from you, in that you should be gracious to your fellowman, and set aside punishment and condemnation as God has done for you.... For if you sincerely believed this, you would do unto your fellowman as God has done unto you. Even if your fellowman does not deserve it, you should, nevertheless do so for God's sake, to pay in return what you owe him. (Quoted by Phil

Brandt, pp.50,51; 47-49, from: The Sermons of Martin Luther: The House Postils. Vol 2. Ed.: Eugene Klug. Baker, 1996. Pp. 276-282.)

Conclusion: The Christian has a great responsibility laid upon him by the graciousness of God. Being a consumer but not a doer of God's grace is simply not an option for us... While God's love is always without precondition, it does seem to be post-conditional. He does seem to have a legitimate expectation that once loved by him, we become lovers as He has loved us (Phil Brandt, pp. 51, 52). This is just what St. Thomas permanent watchword is: LOVED BY GOD. LOVING OTHERS. Amen.

Pastor Carlos Walter Winterle, Cape Town, 09 July 2017