

TRINITY 4

July 9 2017

Old Test: Gen. 50:15-21

Epistle: Rom. 8:18-23

Gospel: Luke 6:36-42

Standing..

Grace be unto you and peace from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

The first half of the Church year focuses on the events of Christ,
(His baptism, temptation, death, resurrection, ascension).

The second half of the Church year focuses on the teachings of Christ—
where this morning He teaches us about how we treat our neighbor;
specifically the neighbor we hate or hates us.

Let us pray. May the words of my mouth and the meditation of all of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord—our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

Sitting..

From the Old Testament we heard of Joseph—who prefigures our Lord,
forgiving his brothers—
the very brothers who tore his clothes,
cast him into a pit,
sold him into slavery,
and convinced their father he was dead.

Years later, Joseph oversees the whole of Egypt.
He has more authority and power than any of us can imagine.
And his brothers come asking him for forgiveness.

Does Joseph hold a grudge for the years he spent as a slave?
No.
Does he go on and on about how much pain he suffered because of them? No.
Though it might have been tempting to do otherwise,
Joseph forgives his brothers. He shows them mercy.
But that's the Old Testament—who really cares about that, right?

Well, when we come to the New Testament, we hear Jesus say, "Love your enemies."

He says this twice before coming to our Gospel lesson.

It's challenging enough to love our family members and the few friends we have...

But our enemies? That is not easy.

Which is why our default mode is to hate them—to detest them.

Making what Jesus says about loving our enemies
the hardest commandment to keep.

Now there are a lot of moving parts in our lesson,
so many in fact that I can't cover them all.

However, something to consider is that more than a commandment, when Jesus tells us to love our enemies, that's an insight into what God is like. God loves His enemies. One could argue from God's perspective He has no enemies. The Scriptures tell us quite plainly God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked. Though He can identify them as wicked, He has no pleasure in their death. Why not? Because the default mode of God is mercy, in that no one gets what they deserve. Sure—many, if not most, refuse God and all He offers, saying to Him, "I don't want You or anything You have to give—I'll go on my own." Nevertheless, all are loved—all are cared for.

His sun shines on the evil and the good. He provides food and nourishment, crops and harvest, rain and shelter, health and necessary skills to all people everywhere, even to those who don't acknowledge Him or worship Him or thank Him. He does it all out of mercy, because without His providence, we would all perish. Moreover, He has sent out His truth to all men: His truth in nature and His truth in His Word. And from His Word we learn the sacrifice of His only begotten Son on the cross for the sins of all men, even for the unthankful and the evil.

Jesus teaches that your Father in heaven is merciful. Something we remind ourselves of when you hear, "O, give thanks unto the Lord for He is good." How do you respond? "And His mercy endureth for-e-ver." When do you sing that? After receiving the Body and Blood of Christ into your mouth! Christ is poured into your ear in the absolution and in the sermon. Then He is poured into your mouth at the altar. So instead of receiving what you deserve, you receive the forgiveness of sins, life and salvation.

God the Father loves His enemies.
 God the Son does too. Consider...
 that as the nails are hammered into His hands—Jesus keeps the
 heart beating of the soldier with the hammer. Jesus could have
 given the soldier a heart attack before the first blow. But He
 doesn't do that. He gives the soldier life so as to continue
 the torture. Jesus did not lash out or condemn any of the
 soldiers. Instead, He prayed, "*Father, forgive them, for they
 know not what they do.*"

God the Father loves His enemies. God the Son loves His
 enemies.

From His vantage point, He has no enemies, neither do you.
 Not anymore.
 Being merciful is what you are to be—
 that you love your enemies and not seek to destroy them.

I realize this is a sensitive subject.
 But I didn't choose the text,
 and Pr. Bruss is out of town.
 So you're stuck with me and we're both stuck with what
 Jesus says.

So, permit me to address two audiences:

First, some of you have been hurt horribly.
 In a crowd this size,
 there's bound to be someone here who's been deserted by
 someone.
 There's someone here whose been befriended then betrayed.
 There's someone here whose wronged you, and there's no
 denying it.

But when you see them, when you see the one who sinned against
 you,
 you cannot see them as "foe..."
 If you're a Christian, you only have one option—
 that is to see them as "friend."
 Now friend doesn't mean BFF—best friend forever.

But it does mean you may not speak ill of them or act with any
 malintent towards them.

I know, I know...you want vengeance—to extract a pound of flesh.
 But to follow that train of thought...a pound of flesh is rarely
 enough...
 for what they did to you, you'd prefer them dead.

And to come this morning and hear Christ teach on mercy, that leaves folks alive,
 but it feels unfair—

It feels like people are getting away with stuff. And this is why we come to church—to hear the Word of God preached and to pray for our enemies. It's hard to hate those whom you pray for. This is why we long to hear the absolution for our own sins (the planks in our eyes) and partake of the Lord's Supper.

When we've been sinned against, what we want is for all the anger—all the bitterness to be squeezed out of the situation so that our focus is to restore the other person.

Just like Joseph did with his brothers...

And just like Jesus does with you.

So pastor, are you telling me

That even though I'm the one whose been sinned against,

That I have to go to him—that I have to go to her, to seek reconciliation?

Sometimes, you do.

The more mature person always moves first.

Now, for the person who committed the sin...

Friend, if you don't confess the sin, it doesn't go away.

And please—please stop believing time heals all wounds.

Time does not heal.

Mercy heals.

Forgiveness heals.

Then, and only then does time do it's work.

But time by itself does not heal—it's not a means of grace.

The sin must be confessed.

When sin is confessed, it's like it turns to ash and is blown away by the wind.

So, stop stuffing it or pretending it didn't happen.

It did happen. And you committed it.

Time doesn't heal—only Christ heals,
 and He only heals what you confess.

To continue to carry it around

will only destroy you in all sorts of ways.

So be brave enough to seek forgiveness and reconciliation.

Be humble enough to act and not ignore the sin any longer.
Remember: the more mature person always moves first.

One of the major differences between Lutherans and American Evangelicals is,

American Evangelicals do a lot of stuff, but they don't know their doctrine.

Lutherans have the right doctrine, but so many of them don't do anything.

Beloved, showing mercy is mature Christianity..

Where we not only know our doctrine correctly,
but we all grow up, and advance in the faith.
It's where the heavy lifting really is.

Now, let me give you some pointers:

When someone confesses, this is what they are to say:

"I have done a horrible thing against you—please forgive me."

When that happens do not respond with, "It's okay."

It's not okay. It's sin.

The proper response is,

"You did do a horrible thing to me. Christ forgives you. I forgive you."

Mercy shows itself in forgiving.

Agree on the sin.

Agree on the forgiveness.

And if possible—if possible, agree on the restitution.

The appropriate response after that is,

"What can I do to make it right?"

Sometimes something can be done.

Money can be repaid, property can be repaired.

But sometimes nothing can be done.

Do what you're able.

As John the Baptist said,

"Bear fruit in keeping with

repentance"

(Matthew 3:8)

Now, gang, showing mercy like this to each other should be our bread and butter.

But it's not—you know why?
 Since we haven't done a good job confessing,
 we haven't done a good job forgiving
 and since we haven't done a good job forgiving,
 we haven't done a good job of moving on together
 in love.

Have we got some work to do in this regard? You're telling me.

I close with this: The most satisfying life (that which we all want) is to do exactly what the Lord asks you to do—but we're not good at it. We fail a lot and need to be forgiven.

The most satisfying life is to rejoice in God's gifts,
 to be baptized,
 to confess,
 to hear absolution,
 to receive His Eucharist,
 to live together in love,
 to care for your family,
 to speak well of everyone,
 and to think of your neighbor first.

All of this stuff you know—it's nothing new.
 But it's difficult to put into practice.

Now's the time friends—
 now is the time.

In the Holy Name of Jesus, Amen.

Standing..

And now may the peace of God which passes all understanding,
 keep your hearts and minds in Jesus Christ. Amen.

8:15—We remain standing for the Te Deum..

11:00—We remain standing for the offertory..