

The Fourth Sunday after Trinity | St. Luke 6:36-42
June 28, 2015 | Parkland Evangelical Lutheran Church

In Nomine Iesu

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O God, whose favor is life, and in whose presence there is fullness of peace and joy, grant unto us, we humbly ask You, such an abiding sense of the reality and glory of those things which You have prepared for those that love You as may serve to raise us above the vanity of this present world, both in its pleasure and in its trials and tribulations, that under Your guidance and help all things here shall work together for our everlasting salvation; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, ever one God, now and forever. Amen. (*The Lutheran Liturgy*, p. 141)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. (Rom. 1:7, etc.)

The sermon text for this morning is taken from the sixth chapter of the Gospel according to St. Luke. We read selected verses in Jesus' name:

[Jesus said:] "Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful. 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." / He also told them a parable: "Can a blind man lead a blind man? Will they not both fall into a pit? A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher. / "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? 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." (ESV)

These are Your words, heavenly Father. Sanctify us by Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen. (Jn. 17:17)

In Christ Jesus, who showed His love not by doing away with the law but by keeping it in our behalf, dear fellow redeemed:

If you were on Facebook the last couple days, you may have seen your news feed explode in rainbow colors. No, Skittles was not running a promotion. And there was no major conference about the Flood either, when God first put the rainbow in the sky. It was because the United States Supreme Court by a vote of 5 to 4 ruled in favor of legalizing gay marriage in all fifty states. The presidential candidates weighed in, with full-throated support or denunciation. The media scanned every Twitter feed to catch any famous person who dared to criticize the court decision.

Sadly, the visible Christian Church is not united on this issue. Even the Lutherans just down the street from us hailed the blanket legalization of gay marriage as a great victory. We know it rather to be a sign of further decay in our society, with *"everyone doing whatever is right in his own*

eyes" (Deu. 12:8; Jud. 17:6, 21:25). Such immorality angers us – why can't people see how wrong this is? It is also frightening – what might Bible-believing Christians face in the future? The court decision certainly sobers us – it shows us the world as it really is and not as we want it to be. How should we respond? Jesus says, **"Do unto Others as You Would Have Them Do unto You."**

I

Of course you know this as "the Golden Rule," but you may not have realized that Jesus spoke it. It was part of His "Sermon on the Mount" and comes just a few verses before today's sermon text. The Golden Rule is one of two passages that today's unbelievers typically know by heart. The other is found in today's text: "*Judge not.*" As you can imagine, the world misunderstands them both.

"*Judge not*" is cited as a way to end any argument or criticism about a person's lifestyle. "Jesus says you should not judge me; you should accept me." "Who are you to judge?" "God tells us to be loving, but all you are interested in is hate. The God I know would never condemn people." Those who make these statements are not concerned about careful, biblical interpretation. They are interested in keeping Christians and their own consciences quiet. If the Christian tries to continue the discussion, the next course of action is to say, "I'm not interested in having a theological debate with you." Or to cite some passage from Leviticus about what a person should wear or what they should and shouldn't eat and ask why we don't live by that too.

"Do unto Others as You Would Have Them Do unto You" is similarly misused. "Would you want someone else to attack your choices? Wouldn't you want them to be loving and accepting of you?" There is something compelling about these arguments. It is true that we do not like others to criticize us. We want to have people's support. The problem is, these statements are all about my glory, not about God's. Such ideas originate with the devil. He is the one propagating the lies believed by so many today.

Notice that the Golden Rule is not, "Do unto others as they would have you do unto them." It is, "Do want you want others to do for you." That is a big difference. My words and actions toward others is not determined by their preferences, but by another standard. A person might want you to tell him that stealing is okay as long as no one finds out, that he can cheat on his wife if she is mean enough, that he can take revenge on others who attacked him first. But that is not the Golden Rule of Jesus. **"Doing unto Others as You Would Have Them Do unto You"** means sometimes speaking the law that condemns sin, so that an individual is led to repent.

After all, isn't this what you would want others to do for you? Wouldn't you want them to warn you if you were practicing destructive behavior that could lead to the loss of your faith in Christ? Of course, no one likes to be told he is wrong, but everyone needs this. We are not perfect. None of us is without sin. If we do not recognize this and humbly repent, we will not follow the Golden Rule. If we do not own up to our sin, we will be in no position to speak to others.

This is important to remember as we watch recent events unfold. We could stand in the temple with our heads held high, thanking God that we are not like the sinners around us (Lk. 18:9-14). We support marriage as the Lord intended it. We would never go along with such wickedness.

But then is it any wonder that unbelievers see us as hypocrites? We are no better than those five Supreme Court justices, no better than the blood-thirsty media, no better than the antagonists, propagandists, and militant activists. When we look at our society today, we should see in it a reflection of our own hearts.

II

The accusations leveled against the Church are often just. We have not always been very loving. We have often been quick to judge. That does not mean judgment is wrong in every case. Jesus never said that. In fact, He said in the Sermon on the Mount that good and bad trees are to be judged by their fruit (Lk. 6:43-45), and that we should beware of false teachers (Mt. 7:15). What we are not called to do is judge the heart. Only God can do that. We are called to judge according to what a person says.

This is how we preserve our unity here at Parkland Lutheran Church and how we maintain it in the Christian Church around the world. We judge by what is confessed. Here, we express our unity each Sunday by reciting together one of the ecumenical Creeds. By doing this, we also join with Christians through the centuries who spoke the same words. We are united in the Christian faith by the Holy Spirit. If the confession of one of us gets off track, God has given us brothers and sisters in Christ to correct us and lead us back to the truth.

This is how love shines forth. Telling people that they can do whatever they want because God loves them is not true and is not loving. Such people are confirmed in their sins and are on the path to eternal suffering in hell. In love we warn one another, we correct one another, we pray for one another. This is what the Golden Rule is all about. Jesus was really doing nothing more with these words than restating the last seven Commandments, which are summarized by this phrase, *"Love your neighbor as yourself."*

Jesus did this. He did love His neighbor as Himself, and loved each person perfectly. Jesus loved the Pharisees and scribes, the prostitutes and tax collectors, the homosexuals and baby killers, the Supreme Court justices, congressional leaders, and presidents, and you and me too. In love He called His neighbors to repent and believe His promises. Many refused. They viewed Jesus as an agent of Satan and a threat to everything good. They even managed to get Him condemned and crucified. His response? *"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do"* (Lk. 23:34). What wondrous love is this! The very ones who despised and killed Him were the ones He wept for, prayed for, died for. He did not *"repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling"* (1Pet. 3:9). He loved, and He calls His followers to do the same to others.

If God did not love you, you would not be sitting here today hearing His Word. You and I would likely be welcoming the Supreme Court ruling as one of the greatest achievements in modern history. We would be utterly lost in our sins. We would have no freedom from a guilty conscience and no hope. What a wretched state this world is in! Our hearts should not harden against the sinners around us. Our hearts should be alive and active with love for them. We can help them. We can speak the life-giving Word, so that they might be drawn out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light and life.

Like me, you may have often been quick to separate yourself from the wicked but slow to show them love and kindness. In this, we must first remove the log out of our own eyes in repentance

before we will see clearly to help others. The sins of your mind and heart are hardly a speck, but Jesus can pick up and take away even the heaviest log of sin. This is exactly what He did when He shouldered the cross, the cross on which He won your salvation. Every log and speck, every unmerciful attitude and unloving judgment is forgiven you by God. And it is forgiveness that is in *“good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over”* into your lap.

We might wish we did not have to live in these troubling days. We might imagine a better time, a golden age, and long to be transported there. But the Lord does not make mistakes. He has put you among these people in this place at this time for a reason. Ever since the fall into sin, there has been no perfect era. The truth has always been attacked. The Church of believers has always been persecuted.

But the One who died to forgive you also now fights for you and for His Church. And the fact that He has not yet returned in judgment means that His patience for the unbelieving world has not run out, just as He remains patient with you and me. So while *“the sufferings of this present time”* continue, remember that they *“are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us”* (Rom. 8:18). The Lord abides with you now in love and grace, and you will abide with Him in perfect unity and peace forever. *Amen.*

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto everlasting life. Amen.

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