

In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

Dear Fellow Redeemed,

In the first half of the Church year, what we call the “semester of Christ,”

(when we celebrate Christmas, Easter, & Pentecost),

our focus is on Christ and His perfect life of mercy, His innocent death, His resurrection & ascension, and His sending of the Holy Spirit.

In the second half of the Church year, what we call the “semester of the Church,”

(the part that we are currently observing during the Trinity Season until Advent),

our focus is... can you guess? ... still on Christ and His perfect life of mercy, His death, resurrection, ascension and sending of the Holy Spirit

and how those acts of mercy are reflected in the lives of His holy people, the Church... you.

So for the next half of the year, you can expect that there will be a lot of teaching about how the Lord wills for you to live in this sinful world.

Today, the big word is mercy.

We read a portion of the Gospel, as follows in Jesus' name:

[Jesus said:] “Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.”^(ESV)

This is Your Word, heavenly Father; sanctify us in the truth, Your Word is Truth. Amen. (John 17:17)

“Mercy” is a big concept, but not just a concept, it is action with a certain attitude.

We often hear the words “grace” and “mercy” together, which is fitting.

We often define “grace” as “undeserved love.”

Grace is an attitude that one has for another.

Mercy could then be defined as the demonstration or application of that grace.

It is the action that demonstrates “undeserved love.”

Thus we hear throughout Christ's earthly ministry, “Lord, have mercy on me.”

The 10 lepers desired healing of their leprosy.

The Syro-Phoenician woman desired that her daughter would have the demon cast out of her.

Blind Bartemaus desired to receive his sight.

They requested God's undeserved love to be demonstrated in their lives.

And the Church takes up this cry constantly, don't we?

Throughout the Divine Service with Holy Communion, we pray at least 4 different times,

“Have mercy upon us.” (*Kyrie, Gloria in Excelsis, Prayer of the Church, Agnus Dei*)

So it is a good thing for us to consider today, what we are praying for

and how the Lord wills for us to live. ... The Lord desires, He wills that you live in His mercy.

So Jesus teaches, admonishes, commands, **“Be merciful.”**

In other words, demonstrate undeserved love.

I am sure that we can all think of times when we have done this, especially with our family.

Acts of kindness, when they have done nothing to earn our love except exist near us.

Or maybe it was to some stranger on the street, or down the block, or in the office.

But what Jesus' commands here is more than just the random act of kindness; it is the way of life.
So what does Jesus mean by "**be merciful**"?

Really, the rest of the text is Jesus unpacking that command.
And what is helpful is that Jesus gives us very memorable audio bites.

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.

The last two, I think are more readily understood by us.
We can understand forgiveness and giving as acts of mercy.
But the first two, perhaps need a little more explanation
because elsewhere Jesus tells His disciples to judge and be discerning,
both about what people say (is it false teaching or not?)
and what they do (are they living contrary to God's commands?).

Here, it's important to see the fuller context of Jesus' words.
Just before our text Jesus had been teaching them about loving their enemies.
This is what mercy is, it is demonstrating love to those who do not deserve it.
Not just to those members of society that are generally good but have fallen on hard times,
But even those who hate you and spitefully treat you, that are actively pursuing ways to harm you.
This helps to demonstrate the impossible nature of this task for us, doesn't it?

It is an attitude that does not self-righteously seek revenge, does not proudly demand retribution,
and is willing to give up its claim to justice for the sake of unity and peace.
This is not what we see in current popular social theories, is it?
So called "Critical Theories" do not have room for such forgiveness.
Instead, in proud, self-righteousness, it judges and condemns.
It legitimizes loveless, even hatred.
It would seek to divide everyone into two classes, either a victim or an oppressor,
with no chance for forgiveness or mercy.
Instead of unifying a people, it seeks to create divisions.

To follow after such Critical Theories is for the blind to follow the blind.
Those who condone and teach such theories do not have in mind the things of God,
but are blindly following the natural self-destructive tendencies of our own corrupted flesh.
Are vengeance and hatred and self-righteousness the measure by which you want
to be measured back to you?

So how are we to understand Jesus' admonition both to judge in other passages
and not judge or condemn in this passage?
Remember that mercy is the demonstration of undeserved love.
It is not loving to let someone continue in his sin, to continue to burden and harden his conscience,
or continue to offend, hurt, or harm others,
causing division between him and God and between him and his fellow man.

We see how Jesus explains Himself in the last parable of our text,
where the brother with a log in his own eye seeks to take out the speck in his brother's eye.
Note that Jesus does not say that the log brother is to say nothing to the speck brother,
and so let the speck turn into a log through unrepentance and further sin.
But the log brother should not try to correct the speck brother in pride and arrogance, either.
Instead, he should first remove the log, then help his brother to remove the speck.

Jesus is teaching us then first to live in the Father's mercy.
First the log brother is to honestly examine himself, his own life,
and he will soon see the log of sin that he has built up.
Upon honest examination, you will see your own utter depravity
and that you yourself should be judged and condemned unmercifully by the omniscient Judge.
That you in no way deserve forgiveness yourself, nor should the kingdom of heaven be given to you.
You will see your need for forgiveness & a Savior.
You will see that you are truly a brother, having the same corrupt & sinful nature as brother Speck.
Then you will call upon the Lord in repentance, "Have mercy on me."

And you will receive it.
The Father's undeserved love demonstrated itself in sending Jesus, not only to preach about mercy
so that the blind wisdom of our age does not lead us into the pit of hell,
but to live a life of mercy perfectly for you:
Jesus mercifully healed those with illnesses and infirmities. He cast out demons.
He **gave** bread to the hungry. He **forgave** those who mistreated Him.

To live in the Father's mercy is to believe that the Lord of heaven and earth humbly submitted Himself
to take on your humanity, to become your brother in every way (yet without sin),
so that He could personally bear your sins, your unmercifulness, your pride, your sinful judgments.
In all humility, without an ounce of pride, He taught, fervently desiring humble repentance.
And in His divine, perfect mercy, He **gave** His life and blood to redeem His enemies.
While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Romans 5:8

To live in the Father's mercy, is first to receive His mercy in Christ,
to receive His undeserved forgiveness daily in humble repentance and faith.
To live in the Father's mercy, is then to allow His mercy to flow over/through you to those around you
in humility and compassion as brothers, fellow sinners, in need of the Father's mercy.
It is to demonstrate Christ's undeserved love in humbly calling them to repentance
so that they might receive Christ's forgiveness, escape God's righteous condemnation on the last day,
and be given eternal life.
To live in the Father's mercy is to generously bless others with the blessings He Himself has given you,
whether they be spiritual or earthly, as little Christs, or Christians in this fallen world.
To live in the Father's mercy is to live in Christ, as baptized children of God.
In Jesus Name. **Amen.**

Soli Deo Gloria