

The Fourth Sunday after Trinity
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✧ Jesu juva ✧

THE MEASURE YOU USE

Genesis 50:15-21, Romans 8:18-23, Luke 6:36-42

Grace, mercy and peace be unto you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.



herefore be cruel and heartless, just as the world around you might be to you. Judge quickly before someone judges you. Condemn before you are condemned by someone else. Nurse that grudge and cherish that anger, for someone is surely holding a grudge against you too. Take before it can be taken from you. For with the same measure that others use, you must measure it to them. Thus sounds the voice of the flesh. And thus, under an increasingly thin veneer of civility, the modus operandi of the unbelieving world. And insofar as the sinful flesh is active in us, we have a part in that world and act as it does. Self before all others! Stick it to them before they stick it to you! That is the measure the world uses. Whether the offender is the idiot driving five miles under the speed limit in the fast lane while talking on his cell phone, or that woman just a few purple and red chairs over that you can't stand, the flesh is at work exalting itself as it judges and condemns the other.

And that flesh is at work in some measure in all of us. For though we have been baptized and declared righteous by God through the blood of Christ, sinfulness still lives in our mortal flesh, in our minds, in our wills and shows itself in our attitudes, words, and actions. And so St. Paul says: "For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body." Yes this world groans on account of these things, and the saint that God has made us to be groans too, even as that saint sees the sinner at work in his own body, mind, and will; even as the flesh nurses and cherishes the sin. The saint cries out, "I shouldn't feel and act this way, I know it is wrong. And I don't want to do it." And the flesh answers: "but I can't help the way I feel. And anyway they deserve my hatred and if I can somehow get the chance and get away with it, my wrath! But at the very least they will get my scorn."

And thus the raging struggle goes on internally, the flesh grasping for its own life, the saint desperately clinging to the life it has been given in Christ. And we groan. And all creation groans with us. My son asked me yesterday afternoon if all of the floods and tornados that have been happening lately are signs that the world is coming to an end. And they are! The creation is in its labor and these are but the birth pangs of the destruction that must come before the new heavens and new earth come forth. Of course these birth pangs are not new to our time. They have been going on since the fall into sin, and will continue up until the last day when Christ returns. But this struggle going on in nature, a struggle between its proper work of providing for mankind and its alien work of destroying mankind, is a vivid picture of the struggle that goes on in each one of us.

As Christians, however, we are called even now to live in the new. We are a new creation by virtue of God's actions upon us in Holy Baptism. We are, as St. Paul rightly says, the sons of God and have the firstfruits of the Spirit. And living in the new means living differently than what our world suggests and our flesh demands. Our Lord tells us today: "Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful. Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you."

This is the way the Christian life is to look. It is to be governed by love which exhibits itself in mercy. And here our Lord means something far broader than giving a few dollars to charity or helping out once in a while in the homeless shelter. The whole Christian life is to be one of mercy toward others. And this begins with the way we treat one another. When someone irritates you, you are to be merciful. You are to treat that person well and respectfully. When someone angers you, you are to be merciful. When someone abuses you, scorns you, hurts you, persecutes you, you are to be merciful. Judge not, condemn not, Jesus says. These are acts without mercy. But how does mercy act? It forgives, and it gives. And that giving is not necessarily a gift of money or goods or even time and talent. It is first and foremost an attitude and mindset, one that shows in even small works and words of kindness and gentility. And I am not speaking here about a false kindness, the veneer of civility, but about a true attitude of mercy toward others.

This is what Luther was speaking about in his explanations to the commandments in the Small Catechism. How are we to treat our neighbors? We are to help and befriend them in every bodily need. We are to lead a chaste and decent life in word and deed, loving and honoring the spouse. We are to help our neighbor improve and protect his property and business. We are to defend him, speak well of him and put the best construction on everything. We are to help and be of service to him in keeping what is his. We are to urge those under his authority to stay and do their duty toward him. In other words, we do not take advantage of our neighbor, we do not judge or condemn. We are to be merciful.

And where does such mercy come from? From the one after whom it is patterned. This command that Christ gives us is rooted in God's own character. "As the Father is merciful," Jesus says. And how is God's character played out? He sends His only begotten Son into this fallen world, to take humanity on Himself and rescue mankind. And Son brings that humanity through suffering and humiliation into death that our sinfulness, now laid on His flesh, may be buried and put away from us. And this He accomplished completely and finally. Here is definitive mercy, a complete giving of the self for the sake of the others.

And now our Savior is risen from the dead, and has also raised you and I up to new life in Holy Baptism. He has declared your sins forgiven and has called you righteous in God's sight. And that is not just a wish. It is divinely mandated and created reality. For with God what is said is also done.

And together, we who have been redeemed by Christ are called His Body. We are now flesh of His flesh and bone of His bones. We are now sons of God through the Son of God. We now have the firstfruits of the Spirit through Him upon whom the Spirit descended and who now sends His Spirit out into the world for the sake of salvation. So as His Body, not just as individuals, but as the

Body of Christ, how should we be? We should be as Christ Himself is and was and always will be. Our Lord says: "A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is perfectly trained will be like his teacher."

Mercy, therefore, must govern our life together as Church. There should be no haughty judgmentalism between Christians. There should be no petty grudges. There should be no division among us who hold the same faith and live under the same grace. We are to be one as God Himself is One. Now I realize this will never happen on this side of heaven, but if it doesn't start here in the Church, then where on earth will it begin? On the positive side, when we do act with grace and mercy toward one another, what is the result among Christians? Jesus tells us: "with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you." And I do not take this as divine reward, but as the simple effect of being kind toward one another. Kindness, mercy and grace breed the same in the one who receives them if that one is of the faith, the Spirit active in them. "Give," Jesus says, "and it will be given back to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom." But if we refuse to give what will we receive? If we refuse to measure rightly, how will it be measured to us?

And if we are to be like our Teacher, then we will share His character too insofar as we are conformed to Him by His grace. And if we are like Him, we will be different from the world around us to a certain degree, and insofar as we are different we will be disliked and perhaps even hated. And yes people may take advantage of your kindness and graciousness, and may even hold you in contempt for it. Some may even suffer after the pattern of Christ. Many have. But remember what St. Paul said: "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."

Above all, what is important about following the example of Christ, is following His faith, His trust in God the Father. And so no matter what you suffer, you are to trust that the Father has a good purpose in mind for you, and is somehow, in a hidden way, working that good purpose out. He has promised that this is the case, after all.

Think of Joseph, about whom you heard in the Old Testament lesson today. Was there ever a man who had more cause to hate his brothers than this one? They had trapped him in a pit, left him to die there, then repented a little and sold him into slavery instead. They told their father that he was dead, so the old man didn't go looking for him. He went from slavery into prison for a while, having been falsely accused by his master's wife. And finally, by the grace of God comes into favor with the Pharaoh and becomes the ruler of Egypt. But what a horrible path to get there! And yet Joseph trusted in God the Father throughout. He was upright. He was merciful. And his mercy shows forth when His brothers come before him at last. Joseph, now the powerful ruler of all Egypt, does not take his vengeance upon them, but forgives them with tears of joy when they repent of their evil against him. And he says to them: "Do not be afraid" and then "you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good." There is graciousness after the pattern of Christ.

And when we repent of our sinful, fleshly world ways, of our foul attitudes, our stinking sins, God also says to us: "Do not be afraid. I will provide for you." And then He does. He speaks comfort and kindness to us, forgiving our sins anew, strengthening our faith, pouring His Holy Spirit into us. And He does this already and continually if we will but receive it. For this is given every time His Word is proclaimed and every time absolution is spoken, every time His Supper is consumed in faith.

And His grace does in us that which we cannot do for ourselves. By His grace we are conformed to His image. The new man, the saint within us is raised up and strengthened, and the old flesh weakened. But we look forward to the day when these groanings will come to an end, when the birth pangs are brought to their fulfillment, and when the flesh is at last purified of the last vestiges of sin. And then we will be glorious too, for His mercy toward us has and will make it so. Amen.

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

✧ Soli Deo gloria ✧