

Be Merciful, Even as Your Father is Merciful
Sermon for the 4th Sunday after Trinity
Sermon Text: Luke 6:36-42

Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful. ³⁷"Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven; ³⁸give, 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." ³⁹He also told them a parable: "Can a blind man lead a blind man? Will they not both fall into a pit? ⁴⁰A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher. ⁴¹Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? ⁴²How 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.

"You reap what you sow" is a popular saying that appears around the world in many variations and in most religions. Do good so that others will be good to you. In today's language, the word "mindfulness" is often used to express all of this. The word comes from Buddhism and aims to draw attention to the fact that we should perceive ourselves and others in a positive way in order to enable better interaction with one another. This is why no one will contradict the words of Jesus, who calls on us to give to others and to be merciful so that we receive an overflowing measure in return. Everyone can understand and support all of this. This is why it is important to first listen to what is different about Jesus' speech here from the popular saying and from general truisms. If we listen carefully, we immediately notice what is different, Jesus brings God into play in the very first sentence. So we should not simply do good to our neighbors. Nor should we go into ourselves, as mindfulness demands of us, but our mindfulness is directed towards God. We are to be merciful, just as our heavenly Father is merciful. Isn't that a shoe too big for us and too high a demand? Isn't that expecting too much of us? Wouldn't it be better to simply love according to the measure that I myself have experienced from others and give back exactly this measure? Is it even possible to love more than we are loved by others? In fact, it becomes clear here that Jesus is talking about a completely different quality of love and mercy. He even contrasts general human love with this love that comes from God alone. And He does this by giving us three examples.

The first example is of a guide who is blind. The example makes it clear that there are people who pretend to want to guide us but are themselves blind. Of course, humans need guidance and want to know which way to go. The little navigation devices on our phones show us the way around the city. But we all know how frustrating it can be when the satellites get mixed up and we are led astray. It is the same for people who have entrusted their lives to a false teacher. When Jesus spoke of blind guides, He often meant precisely those who pretend to know the way with truisms and general wisdom. The teachers of the Law in Jesus' time did exactly the same thing. They constantly had high expectations of people. But they themselves could not even adhere to these expectations and were therefore blind guides leading the blind. The laws of those times did not lead to God any more than the platitudes of today can. No matter how impressive a lamp may be, if it is not connected to the power supply, it cannot produce light. We humans are just as helpless without God. In the end, the blind leaders of the law must fall into the pit with their followers.

The second parable that Jesus gives us is that of the teacher and his pupil. "A pupil cannot be better than his teacher." Jesus tells us. The fellowship we have in Christ is our orientation. No community can be as close as this connection to Jesus. This puts us on a completely new path. Life without Jesus is based on pious performance, on ability and success, or on an impeccable public life. In this conflict, we are always in competition with our brothers and sisters. Even among Christians and even among pastors, there is this competition, and Satan knows how to achieve distraction among Christians in this way. In Jesus there is no such competition. Our Lord tears down the fences of legalism. For we are all disciples of our Lord who live on the basis of mercy. Nothing more and nothing less. Even my fellow human being who annoys me belongs in the space of mercy and trusts in it. We are all disciples of Jesus, not better than the others, but just like the other brothers and sisters.

Thirdly, Jesus explains the parable of the man with the log in his eye. The person who loses sight of this love and mercy of God has a plank in front of his head. He is still in competition with his brothers. In this he always considers himself better than the others. He sees the speck in his brother's eye, which he wants to take out, but does not recognize the log in his own eye. Jesus is talking here about a spiritual arrogance that can be extremely dangerous for us all. Anyone who considers themselves a Christian is quickly tempted to look down on others who

are not yet Christians or who cannot live as a Christian should. It can then easily happen that we become self-righteous and condescending. Mercy is not passed on by the power of God but becomes routine and a duty! And it is even worse that the log in my own eye casts a shadow on the other. I always carry my own guilt and my own hurts around with me. And these hurts and guilt cause me to see my own mistakes in the other person's life and even project them onto the other person. Because I have a guilty conscience myself, I can't forgive the other person either. Because I have not tasted forgiveness myself, I cannot forgive others either. The Biblical word for forgiveness actually means to release. And that is precisely what is so difficult for us humans to do. We cannot forget. The mistakes that our parents made, that our work colleagues made, that other church members made, are burned deep into my soul. The problem is that I can't forgive myself or others. And that is why I am unfree. Instead of this catastrophic principle of life, Jesus wants to introduce us to a completely different one. The point is that I do not draw anything from myself, but from God. Any mercy we show to others assumes that we have experienced this mercy ourselves.

These words make it clear that Jesus is basically presenting us with two ways of life. One way of life draws solely on the reserves of one's own strength. When I draw on my own strength, I quickly realize that my mercy and compassion have limits. I can't even give people in my immediate environment the love and care they need. And when I try to do so, I am like a blind guide leading the blind. With these words, Jesus shows us that the Christian life has a very practical dimension that extends into everyday life. Being a Christian does not mean that I only commit myself to Christ once in my life or that I only profess my faith once. Being a Christian means that I do not want to live my whole life without Christ my Teacher and my Savior. Christ wants us to draw from Him and from His strength. I should not and must not have the delusion that Jesus accompanies me every once in a while to church on Sundays, while otherwise I can get by without Him. But I can draw on His strength and His infinite love, mercy, and forgiveness for daily life and for my personal life.

This Sunday's Old Testament story reminds us of how this works. This story is about Joseph, the son of Jacob, who was thrown into a well by his brothers. They actually wanted to kill him but then sold him to the Egyptians. He was to work as a slave for the rest of his life. He was considered dead by his brothers and father. The brothers mistreated Joseph, blamed him, and then considered him dead - if ever a person had reason to be bitter and done with other people, it was Joseph. But Joseph took a different path. He took a very, very long path, a path that cost a lot of pain, a path that cost a lot of suffering. Joseph took the path of forgiveness. It was different for Joseph's brothers. Despite everything, they could not sort themselves out. Even after they were safely in Egypt. And even after everything had been cleared up and Joseph had forgiven them, the fear came up again. They still carried the log of sin around with them. And this is what happened: after their father, Jacob, had died, doubt arose in the brothers' hearts. "What if Joseph had only protected them because of their father? Then he could really kill them all now after their father's death. And so they came up with a little lie to save their own skins. It should be said that before his death, Jacob had once again expressed the wish that Joseph should forgive his brothers. When Joseph heard this, he wept once again. Perhaps because he recognized the brothers' lie, perhaps because the old bitterness came up again. After all these years, the pain was still not gone. But in this situation, Joseph was granted something that none of his brothers could recognize. Joseph could see what none of his brothers could see. Namely, that God had a hand in it all. That is what I call the finest spiritual maturity. You only get maturity like that as a gift from God. When someone in the midst of incomprehensible cruelty and terrible selfishness can still recognize the silent and almost invisible hand of God, then that is a miracle. And Joseph finally replied: "You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good," he said (Gen. 50:20). Joseph can recognize God's hand in his terrible fate. And by doing so, redemption happens not only between him and his brothers, but also between him and God. Here you can really feel how all the bitterness comes out of human relationships. Isn't that always God's way? Where reconciliation happens, God has a hand in it. The laws in our world are different. Bitterness, resentment, and hatred are on the rise. An outrage calls for even greater retribution. This is not the way of our God. The past is dealt with in the belief that God can also turn evil to good. Reconciliation says: I want to be there for you again, to the best of my ability. Jesus calls on you today to forgive your brother or sister because He has forgiven us. Jesus wants all the bitterness to come out. He wants you to be free and set others free! Therefore: *Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.* Amen.