

The Fourth Sunday after Holy Trinity

Luke 6:36-42

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

How do you judge your own behavior?

Is it by emotions?

It feels good when I do this, so I continue to do this. It feels bad when I do that, so I won't continue doing that! Eating is a great example. This tastes great, so I'll keep eating this. This tastes horrible... no more cauliflower for me! Sugar tastes great, so I'll continue to stuff my face full of sugary products even though it gives me bad results in the long run. Intellectually, I know that sugar is bad for me, but it sure doesn't taste bad does it? The immediate rewards for my body outweigh the long term effects until those long term effects become bad enough to initiate change. This is how animals live.

Do you judge your behavior by its results?

When I do this, it gives me this result I want, so I'll keep doing this. When I do that, it gives me the result I don't want, so I'll stop doing that. Sex is a great example. Sex is fantastic, so I'll do whatever I can to get it even if I what I have to do to get it is risky. It's so great, that I'll even justify abortion, the killing of an innocent baby, to continue having it on my own terms. After all, I don't want to marry this guy that I casually slept with or be saddled with the burden of being a parent the rest of my life. This kind of judging can justify all manner of sin, can't it?

Do you judge your behavior by the expectations of others?

Your peers expect a certain behavior from you. If you do it, you're honored and if you don't, you're shamed. This gets teenagers into all sorts of trouble, doesn't it?

So, how *should* you judge your behavior?

Turn in your hymnals to page 292.

If you come in for private confession and absolution, this is the rite that we'll use. Let's go ahead and say it together and I'll add a little commentary as we go along:

Pastor, please hear my confession and pronounce forgiveness in order to fulfill God's will.

Proceed.

I, a poor sinner, plead guilty before God of all sins. I have lived as if God did not matter and as if I mattered most. My Lord's name I have not honored as I should; my worship and prayers have faltered. I have not let His love have its way with me, and so my love for others has failed. There are those whom I have hurt, and those whom I have failed to help. My thoughts and desires have been soiled with sin.

This is a great confession of sins, isn't it? I don't believe there's a sin that you've committed that isn't covered by this confession. You don't *have* to confess a particular sin if you don't want to. My job isn't to investigate your hidden sins. I'm not going to go digging around your life. But, this rite is extremely helpful for you if you have something that the Holy Spirit or Satan keeps bringing to your conscience. The red rubric indicates this by saying:

If you wish to confess specific sins that trouble you, continue as follows:

What troubles me particularly is that...

And then it tells you how to judge your behavior:

Confess whatever you have done against the commandments of God, according to your own place in life.

This is the key to how to judge your behavior. You use the Ten Commandments and your stations in life. The confession of a police officer is going to look different than the confession of a driver for Enterprise. The confession of a father is going to look different than the confession of his son or daughter. God has placed you in different situations and you have different responsibilities and therefore different sins. However, you have the same conclusion in the confession:

I am sorry for all of this and ask for grace. I want to do better.

I'm going to take you at your word. I'm not going to try and see if you *really really* mean it. I proceed:

God be merciful to you and strengthen your faith.

Amen.

Do you believe that my forgiveness is God's forgiveness?

Yes.

Let it be done for you as you believe.

And then I will put my hand on your head and give you the words you love to hear:

In the stead and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

Notice I may give you additional Scripture passages but it's not to make you feel bad or to make you feel like you're on the straight and narrow now. I may give you passages in order to strengthen your faith. Then comes the conclusion:

Go in peace.

Amen.

What a wonderful gift. You understand that grace is “given to you, good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over... put into your lap.” (v 38)

You have the same feeling when you remember your baptism and when you eat your Lord’s Body and Blood for the forgiveness of your sins.

Then you understand your Lord’s admonition: “Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.” (v. 36)

Only those who have received mercy can extend it. Only those who have peace with God can extend that peace to others.

Christians aren’t perfect. We mess up. We sin and hurt others. Sometimes we are rightly called hypocritical.

Our mess ups don’t impress people. But living in the grace of God in the midst of our troubles is what impresses people. Paul puts it this way:

“The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life.” (1 Timothy 1:15-16)

The Christian life is one of receiving mercy and extending mercy.

Jesus says, “judge not, and you will not be judged.” (v. 37) He follows it up with this admonition: “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." (vv. 41-42)

Jesus doesn't say to ignore the speck in your brother's eye. He tells you to first remove the log out of your own eye and *then* you will be able to see clearly to address the speck in your brother's eye. In other words, Jesus is saying "Judge rightly."

The log from your eye gets removed by examining yourself against God's Word and your station in life and by receiving the Holy Absolution.

Here's a concrete example.

Active homosexuality is a grave sin. You can show that it's wrong according to the natural law, or the law written on everyone's heart, and by God's revealed will. However, after examining yourself against God's Law and your own situation, you understand that your sins against the 6th Commandment are just as grave and may have even led to the current situation where homosexuality is not only seen as okay but is actually celebrated in our society. (Romans 1:32) The sexual revolution of the 60's was not carried out by homosexuals, but by heterosexuals who rebelled against God's righteous law that sex only belongs in monogamous, lifelong unions of male and female that may produce children who are brought up in the fear and admonition of the Lord.

After removing the log of sexual sin in your own life through absolution, you're in a position now to help someone else.

But why do we admonish the active homosexual?

Is it because we hate homosexuals?

That's no Christian motivation even though the Scriptures have been abused to do all manner of evil against homosexuals.

No, we admonish homosexuality because we care about that homosexual person.

If someone engages in sodomy, he will have temporal consequences. One of the saddest letters I've ever read was by a homosexual man who repented of his life of sin, but was living the physical consequences of his past behavior. He will live with them until he dies. Any caring person wouldn't want anyone to have to suffer these things. We want to warn them so they don't have to suffer unnecessarily.

If someone never repents from sodomy, he will have eternal consequences. No matter how bad the temporal consequences for any sin, the eternal consequences of unrepentant sin is horrendous. Eternal torment and separation from any kind of mercy. We want to warn them even more of the eternal consequences so they don't have to suffer eternal damnation.

There's a misconception out there that if you haven't experienced whatever behavior a person is struggling with, you have no right to admonish them to behave differently.

A friend of mine addressed this in a great way. He was chastised by a homosexual who assumed that it was easy for him to live a chaste life. He let him know that he wasn't married and struggled greatly to remain chaste and to honor God. I think we can all see the ridiculousness of someone assuming there's no struggle in our life! We're all sinners. Every one of us struggles with sin. Only those who have been released from their sin through Holy Absolution actually have something *substantial* to say about that struggle against sin. And you know personally that it is a constant struggle.

Paul expressed it best and you know it well: "For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the

ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.” (Romans 7:18-19)

This is why our lives flow out of Sunday morning instead of the other way around. For many, church on Sunday is an afterthought. They need to take to heart Paul’s words: “For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” (1 Corinthians 1:18) We start each week receiving the word of the cross, that is the absolution, preaching, and Lord’s Supper, so that we might receive and learn mercy. Then you are prepared to go out into the stations in life where God has placed you.

Then you’re prepared to “be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.” (v. 36)

Then God uses you to show His mercy to an unloving, unmerciful world.

Just as Jesus ate with tax collectors, sinners, and Pharisees, He sends you out to do the same.

You aren’t the blind leading the blind, but a fellow beggar of God’s mercy showing other beggars where that mercy is!

May God continue to bless you richly as you live a life filled with His mighty mercy and grace.

In Jesus name. Amen.