

The Fourth Sunday after Trinity
Luke 6:36-42

Today's sermon may feel a little like the blind leading the blind! This is an area in which I struggle:

Do not judge and you will not be judged.

Do not condemn and you will not be condemned.

Forgive and you will be forgiven.

Today, I'm thinking of one particular area where this should apply: arguments.

And I mean arguments in the old-fashioned sense. An argument in the old-fashioned sense was a discussion between two people or two groups of people where the ultimate aim was to find out the truth. Even if you finished your argument by disagreeing, you still remained agreeable with each other. Of course, there were some people who could never argue well in the old-fashioned sense or in the current way of arguing. And, of course, there was never a time where arguments went well with everyone.

But one thing I don't want us to do is think of "fight" when we think of argument. The people attacking supreme court justices and pregnancy resource centers are fighting. They have no interest in discussion or arguing.

But people supposedly wanting discussion nowadays aren't interested in actual discussion. People on the other side of the aisle are judged as stupid or incompetent. People on the other side of the aisle are condemned as idiots who need thrown out of office or whatever social media they're on. There is no sense of forgiveness on either side of the aisle.

And I must admit that I find it hard to not mock those who cannot tell the difference between a boy and a girl. I find it hard not to want to throw into jail those who insist on giving children life altering drugs and surgeries that will scar them for life.

This is not the way of Jesus.

This is not the way of evangelism which is how we bring others to Jesus.

Even though I struggle with this, there are three things we can take away from today's Gospel.

[I. It's just as hard for God to save the militant abortionist as it is to save you.]

First, It's just as hard for God to save the militant abortionist as it is to save you!

It's just as hard for God to save the child-destroying transgender activist as it is to save you!

We're all born in sin hating God, enemies of God, and wanting nothing else than to be our own gods. "None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one. Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive. The venom of asps is under their lips. Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood; in their paths are ruin and misery, and the way of peace they have not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes." (Romans 3:10-18) We see that played out today, do we not?

Sometimes, it's hard to remember that this used to be you!

It's even hard to remember at times that this darkness resides within you and lies close at hand waiting to trip you up in a moment of weakness.

You love God. You are a generous people. You take to heart Paul's admonition, "As we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith." (Galatians 6:10) I've seen you act this way with my own eyes! You've been washed clean in the purifying waters of Baptism and you have God's Holy Spirit. You regularly receive the body and blood of Jesus in the Lord's Supper. You know the love of Christ intimately.

Yet, even you sometimes forget that Christ died for all people. Even the people you despise. And you may have good reason to despise them. But Christ died for them too.

Christ didn't just die for the godly. Christ died for all people. As Paul says, "For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would

dare even to die—but God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (Romans 5:6-8)

Christ died for the belligerent. The belligerent person thinks so much of themselves and so little of everyone else that they try to intimidate and scare those around them. Yes, Christ died for them.

Christ died for the fornicators. The fornicator thinks only of his or her animal passions and even uses abortion as a form of birth control to escape any responsibility for their own actions. Yes, Christ died for them.

Christ died for the selfish. The selfish person thinks only of himself or herself and doesn't care how their identity or actions hurts themselves or others. Yes, Christ died for them.

Christ died for the idolater. Idolaters make anything their god, be it the environment or money or power, no matter how foolish it may be in the cold light of reality. Yes, Christ died for them.

Christ died for you. No matter how lost you were in your sin and trespasses, Christ died for you. You may have been lost as an infant or you may have been lost until later in life. No matter, Christ died for you.

Remember that Christ died for you and for that person you are engaging with. Whether it's on social media or in person, the person you are arguing with is one that Christ shed His blood for. That's why we don't judge or condemn a person. No matter how ugly or obstinate they are, Christ died for them just as certainly as He died for you!

[II. Mercy/Compassion is the only thing that calms hate and violence.]

Second, you know the mercy of God. Jesus says, “Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.” (v. 36)

Mercy looks weak in the eyes of the world, but mercy is the only thing that can save the world.

You know the Old Testament saying, “If anyone injures his neighbor, as he has done it shall be done to him, fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth; whatever injury he has given a person shall be given to him.” (Leviticus 24:19-20)

The basic meaning of this verse is that the punishment should match the crime. But this applies to justice and not to personal vengeance. We don't want the justice system to show mercy. And we want the punishment to match the crime. In this way the Law acts as a curb and works to make society safe for everyone. When it works well. Where we see corruption in the justice system, we should work to correct it. But in our personal lives, we are governed by mercy and not by justice.

Jesus says this right before our Gospel reading today:

“Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. To one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from one who takes away your cloak do not withhold your tunic either. Give to everyone who begs from you, and from one who takes away your goods do not demand them back.” (Luke 6:27-30)

Jesus doesn't put any conditions on this. This doesn't mean you don't report criminal activity. And it certainly doesn't mean you don't defend your family. But this *does* mean you risk getting taken advantage of. This *does* mean you suffer injustice, or even personal injury, without repaying that injustice. This *does* mean you count your goods as not belonging to you, but to Christ. This *does* mean you'll be counted as a weak fool, but you are God's fool. And God will repay. As Paul says, “Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.’” (Romans 12:19)

To behave this way, you must have the Spirit of God. And you must know the mercy of God.

You received the Holy Spirit in your baptism and He works in you every time you hear and eat and drink the Word of God. If you aren't immersed in the Word of God, the Holy Spirit does very little work. How many of us meditate on the Word of God when we sit in our house or go by the way or when we rise and when we lie down as we are instructed to? (Deuteronomy 6:6-9, Psalm 1) How many of us go first to the Word of God or prayer when we are confronted by the ugliness of life?

We understand the mercy of God when we understand our own depravity and when we see what Christ has done. Advent and Lent are meant for us to meditate on God's Law to see how wicked we truly are. They also culminate in the two biggest celebrations of the year, Christmas and Easter.

At Christmas we see a God who joins us in our weakness. God Himself takes on human flesh. He is tempted in every way we are tempted. And these are real temptations. God doesn't make a mockery of your struggles and suffering, but joins you in them. What is my suffering when I consider the sufferings of my Lord? He shares my suffering and, even greater, He shares the suffering of all people. And then we see in Passion Week that culminates in Easter, the triumph of Jesus over our struggles and suffering. He takes sin, death, and the devil head on and defeats them on their own turf. He shares that incredible victory with us out of compassion and mercy even though we don't deserve it! What is my suffering if I consider the victory of Jesus that is mine in faith? What is my suffering if I consider the future glory that awaits me? As Paul says, "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us." (Romans 8:18)

We can show mercy because we have been shown mercy in Christ. When we fail to show mercy to others whom Christ died for, we forget the mercy that He has shown to us. Let us not forget God's mercy because mercy changes hearts just like it changed yours!

[III. The truth matters.]

Third, let us never forget that the truth matters.

In an attempt to bring sinners to Christ and to show mercy, many compromise the truth of the Scriptures. If we compromise the truth, we compromise Jesus. Jesus reveals Himself through the written Word of God which means the Word of God matters.

Jesus says, "If you abide in My word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." (John 8:31-32)

Paul says, "Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work." (2 Timothy 3:12-17)

We must be careful to safeguard what we believe from the Scriptures. This means you need to continue to be a theologian. You are all theologians. That's not reserved just for pastors or other church workers, but for every man, woman, and child of God. Anytime you say, "The Bible says..." you are engaging in theology. Theology matters.

Some Christians say that God works in Baptism to save sinners. Other Christians say that Baptism is a work of obedience by the Christian for God. I hope that it's obvious they both cannot be true. Can you explain what you believe about Baptism to an unbeliever or believer from the Scriptures?

Some Christians say that Jesus is bodily present in the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper that gets placed on the tongue of the communicant. Other Christians say that the Lord's Supper is merely a memorial meal of bread and wine only. I hope that it's obvious that they both cannot be true. Can you explain what you believe about the Lord's Supper to an unbeliever or believer from the Scriptures?

And it's important to remind ourselves that we believe what we believe because it's drawn from Scripture and not because we are imposing some kind of philosophical system onto the Word of God.

And when you enter into discussions with both unbeliever and believer alike, does charity rule your behavior? Are you actually interested in the person you're talking to or are you more concerned about being right? Do you listen to them or do you wait for an opportunity to pounce on the way they say something?

Do we know what we believe and why?

I believe we need to double down on being "Lutheran." Our confessions are the clearest explanation of the Word of God. Let us not try to be like the big box churches or the world of entertainment, but let us be unreservedly and unapologetically Lutheran.

But at the same time, let us double down on using the term "Christian" instead of "Lutheran." The Lutheran Church is the Christian Church. To be Lutheran is to be Christian. Sometimes, we get bogged down in denominationalism. The answer to this is not to act as if denominational differences don't matter. They do matter. Sometimes eternally. If someone dies wholly embracing the doctrine of the Roman Catholic church, they are damned forever. I believe many Roman Catholics don't

fully embrace the Roman Catholic teachings and cling to Jesus in faith. These will be saved eternally. But they are saved *in spite of* bad doctrine and *not because of it*. If someone dies fully embracing the teaching of the Book of Concord, they will be saved eternally because our confessions rightly teach salvation by grace alone through faith alone for the sake of Christ alone. We have an absolute treasure in our Book of Concord because it lines up and is shaped by the Word of God.

I have been thinking a lot about evangelism this Trinitytide. All of us are admonished to “always be prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect.” (1 Peter 3:15)

What would happen if we treated everyone as if Christ died for them?

What would happen if we were merciful as our heavenly Father is merciful, even to the point of personal injury or harm?

What would happen if we were unreservedly and unapologetically Lutheran because we believe it to be true?

You will struggle and stumble. That’s okay. God uses imperfect tools to complete His perfect works. Let us continue to struggle and stumble knowing that our efforts will not be in vain because God is living and active in His Word and in His people. (1 Corinthians 15:58)

Amen!