

SERMON FOR EVENING PRAYER¹
The Fourth Sunday after Trinity²

Lessons:³

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the twenty-seventh Chapter of the Proverbs.⁴

“Boast not thyself of to morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth. Let another man praise thee, and not thine own mouth; a stranger, and not thine own lips. A stone is heavy, and the sand weighty; but a fool’s wrath is heavier than them both. Wrath is cruel, and anger is outrageous; but who is able to stand before envy? Open rebuke is better than secret love. Faithful are the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful. ... Thine own friend, and thy father’s friend, forsake not; neither go into thy brother’s house in the day of thy calamity: for better is a neighbour that is near than a brother far off. My son, be wise, and make my heart glad, that I may answer him that reproacheth me. A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself; but the simple pass on, and are punished.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the thirty-sixth Verse of the sixth Chapter of the Gospel according to St. Luke.⁵

“... Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful. Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven: give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again. And he spake a parable unto them, Can the blind lead the blind? shall they not both fall into the ditch? The disciple is not above his master: but every one that is perfect shall be as his master. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother’s eye, but perceivest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Either how canst thou say to thy brother, Brother, let me pull out the mote that is in thine eye, when thou thyself

beholdest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, cast out first the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to pull out the mote that is in thy brother's eye."

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. *Amen.*

Homily:

Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be always acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer.

And so we are challenged by Jesus this morning. He gives us the very measure that our lives and mission should own up to. The opening line of our Gospel lection this morning is, "Be ye therefore merciful."

How have you shown mercy to those that surround you? Have you peaceably dealt with your friends, your spouses, your neighbors, your children, those that come into contact with you on a daily basis with compassion and mercy? Or have you been spiteful, judgmental, being without concern for the well-being of others, while placing your own needs in the forefront of your concern?

Have you shown forgiveness, kindness, selflessness, and a sense of duty towards those you meet in passing, as well as those who consume your everyday lives?

If we search deeply into our souls, and find within ourselves that we do not measure up to this standard shown to us in this morning's Gospel, then we can come to the realization that we are not a functioning limb of the Body of Christ. We are as a paralytic. As a matter of fact, Jesus calls us, in this morning's parable, blind men. And how true that is! Can the blind lead the blind? Will they both not fall into the ditch? Christians are the greatest single cause of atheism in the world today, Christians who acknowledge Him with their lips, walk out the door, and deny Him by their lifestyle. That is what an unbelieving world finds simply unbelievable.

In the Collect for this morning, the prayer for the day, we pray specifically for God to *Increase and multiply upon us [His] mercy*. Why would that be so significant, in comparison, to what the Church has appointed for today's lections? The Gospel is clear, we ask for increase because the Gospel challenges us to have good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and overflowing or running over. We need to be filled with the mercy of God so much that we burst open, and that mercy that He has bestowed upon us should begin to saturate all those with whom we come into contact.

We should not judge, or we will be judged. We should not condemn, lest we shall be condemned. We should forgive, so we can be forgiven. For the same measure that we mete withal, it shall be measured to us.

The disciple is not above his master. Jesus Christ was the ultimate example of forgiveness and compassion. He sacrificed His very life source, His shed Blood, without thought of Himself, without placing His needs before those for whom He came to die. He gave it all up, to reach out and save humanity. And He did it all in mercy. When we look into an icon or an image of Christ, or better yet, even sacred Scripture itself, it should be as though we gaze into a mirror. If you don't see your reflection, then can we say with all honesty that we are truly the Image of Christ?

He came down and sacrificed everything for me and for you, out of mercy, compassion, and because He purchased us by dying on the Cross of Calvary, and because we have placed our faith in Him, He demands that we also sacrifice everything for humanity, without exception.

This is what it means to live out the Gospel. To be brave is to be meek. To be strong is to have mercy. To be triumphant is to be compassionate. And that is what a triumphant life is. It is a life lived carrying the Cross of Christ, bearing the weight of the sins of the world in compassion, which means shared suffering, while the fire of the love of God burns so bright within us, that it catches everything and everyone around us ablaze.

But we have brought dysfunction to the Body of Christ because of our selfish pride and haughtiness. We would rather point out the sins of the world, in a reli-

gious indignation, pointing the finger at all those who are not like us, who don't believe what we believe, who don't hold the same religious and political points of view that we do. And because of this, we have made our beloved Faith irrelevant, a faith that no longer changes lives, a faith that no longer penetrates sinners' hearts.

And then we ask why our society has moved into a post-modern/post-Christian era. The finger can only point towards us because we have failed to listen to the Master's warning in today's Gospel. We are more ready to point out the sins of others than to bear them while sharing the loving message of Christ's mercy.

Everybody is so scared these days by the term most mainline denominations use to exalt their policies on who can come in and become a part of their communities and who can hold leadership within their congregations. The word "inclusive" has replaced the word "welcome" on their doormats and no one wants to be seen as less than inclusive. Of course their ideas and definitions of inclusivity are distorted, to the point where they completely oppose the message of sacred Scripture, but are these "inclusive" people to blame for this distortion?

According to our founder, the Church *IS* to be inclusive, but not condoning. We are to love our neighbors, love and welcome the sinners, but preach the truth of the Gospel so it can change their lives. Love the sinner, hate the sin. But because we have too often told the secular world that people must fit our mold before they step through these doors, the secular world has rejected the truths we preach because the light of our compassion has been snuffed out. And because the light of our compassion has been snuffed out, we now preach a cold, dead religion that does not save, much less penetrate, the sinner's heart.

And so, to keep the bills paid, to keep the doors open, to keep the name of whatever denomination is on the sign in front of the Church, they would rather preach an unchristian Christianity, watering down the truth of God's Word, and allow the secular to infiltrate the sacred.

But we are the cause of all this decay. Why you may ask? These inclusivists' use of a watered down Gospel is no more unChristian than is speaking the Truth of the Gospel of Christ without compassion.

Because the world has rejected our religious bigotry, those within some “Christian” churches have allowed anyone and anybody to walk through their doors, while refusing to preach the Truth to those who remain outside of sanctifying grace, because they fear offending their hearers even more than they fear relegating them to damnation. This type of inclusivity, when pursued in the name of Christ, is blasphemous; its proponents today are often called “seeker-sensitive” churches.

You may have heard me say before that truth without love is merely facts. But also love without truth is a lie.

And so, the cycle of religious chaos never ends. Our lack of compassion, our lack of mercy, our sense of condemnation has brought these evils to fruition in these last days. All the while, Christ is compelling us to *Be ye therefore merciful*.

We can no longer point the finger at the sins that engulf the secular society today, without being Christ to those sinners. A man named Bruce Carroll released a song that said, “I would rather see a sermon, than to hear one any day.” Saint Francis said, “At all times, preach the Gospel. When necessary, use words.”

Instead of chastisement, we should each look upon humanity and realize that if it were not for the grace of God, there go I. That is what Jesus was telling us in His figure of speech about the mote and the beam. Too often we are quick to point out the sins of others, forgetting that we, ourselves, are sinners saved by grace. We are not perfect but we chose to follow a Blood-stained trail that leads to life everlasting.

Jesus came to save us, not by harsh words or by religious indignation, but with self-sacrificial love and mercy. And as His blood was poured out, so His grace and mercy was likewise. So it is that we, who follow His good example, should allow that mercy, which we asked this morning to increase, to flow freely from our lives. It’s not about us against the world but about life and death. Fallen humanity depends on us to show His self sacrificial love and compassion, while living out the Gospel that we hold so dearly.

Let us pray:

MOST merciful God, who art of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, and hast promised forgiveness to all those who confess and forsake their sins; We come before thee in an humble sense of our own unworthiness, acknowledging our manifold transgressions of thy righteous laws. But, O gracious Father, who desirest not the death of a sinner, look upon us, we beseech thee, in mercy, and forgive us all our transgressions. Make us deeply sensible of the great evil of them; and work in us an hearty contrition; that we may obtain forgiveness at thy hands, who art ever ready to receive humble and penitent sinners; for the sake of thy Son Jesus Christ, our only Saviour and Redeemer. *Amen.*

—oo0oo—

The Rev'd J. Steven Victory⁶
July 1, 2012

¹ “Any set of Psalms and Lessons appointed for the evening of any day may be read at the morning service, and any set of morning Psalms and Lessons may be read in the evening.” *Concerning the Service of the Church*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER viii (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

² This sermon was originally written on the Gospel for Holy Communion on the Fourth Sunday after Trinity, 2012.

³ *Psalms and Lessons for the Christian Year* (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxix (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

⁴ Proverbs 27:1-6, 10-12 (KJV).

⁵ St. Luke 6:36-42 (KJV).

⁶ Rector, The Anglican Church of St. Charles King and Martyr (APCK), Huntsville, AL.