

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.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: “[F]orgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For the measure you give will be the measure you get back.”⁶ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Homily:

Don't you just hate people who aren't just like us? You know the ones—always trying to get away with something. They always want something. They're always scheming and conniving—you just can't trust 'em. And those people who say nice things to you! You know they really want to take advantage as soon as you turn your back.

We do love to judge, don't we? We are full of vitriol when it comes to passing out judgment of others' conduct, motives, appearance and life. None of us are immune to this—which partly helps to explain the popularity of television shows about “Judge Whoever”. These shows permit their viewers to take part vicariously in the judgment and punishment of others.

When we take part in this kind of judging of others, we engage in the vices of pride and vanity in the pretense that we could never be in the same position. We also typically engage in anger and wrath about things in which what we are truly seeking is vengeance.

Please know that I do not leave myself out in this. I work in a jail—I have plenty of opportunity to take part in this particular game. It is an every-day fight

to avoid the temptation to take part in this kind of self-exaltation. It is a fight we do not win every day.

It is not the practice of the legal system that is problematic here. It is taking a position that we are better than others, and that for that reason we are permitted to judge, that is the issue. We are not better—no matter our pretense. There is an old saying, “There *but for* the grace of God go I,” and it is well to remember it, for truly, each of us is capable of making the same kinds of mistakes that even those people we may despise have made.

And so our Lord tells us to be merciful, as God is merciful. Imitate God, in other words. Not that we are capable of achieving such imitation, but we are called to try. This kind of charity is called the “bond of perfectness” by St. Paul in his letter to the Colossians.⁷ Surely we should endeavor to be as God in our lives.

We are therefore called to be merciful, to forego judging others, both because we ourselves may require that same mercy and because in acting as God is acting as God wills—which means that we ourselves may be forgiven and receive mercy.

Further, we actually stand to improve ourselves as we act with mercy and withhold judgment. As we give, so we receive, as we forgive, so are we forgiven. As we act in charity and love, so will we also receive charity and love.

We have the word of our Lord Jesus Christ that this is so. Consider the words of the Lord’s Prayer: “... *and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us*”⁸ And again, “*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.*”

This may seem to be a curious way to describe measuring forgiveness, but it is drawn from the measurement of grain—a food that is necessary for life and was especially so in the ancient Near East. And so, however much we forgive, that much we will be forgiven—with extra measure added. Our Lord says the measure

will be pressed down—to allow more to fit in, then shaken—to allow settling—and yet still running over.

In this part of the world, we call this *lagniappe* [**LANN-yapp**]—a little extra for good measure. If we forgive much, then even more will be forgiven us.

Much of this particular message was directed by Jesus at the Pharisees but it applies to us as well. Our Lord was trying to get them to see that they were only condemning themselves with their harsh rules and judgments of others. He drew the comparison between the retribution of the leaders of the day, and the merciful forgiveness of God.

To make the point absolutely clear to His listeners, our Lord explained this to them in a parable: “*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.*”

If you do not understand God’s law, then you cannot teach it to others. If you refuse to understand God’s law then so much the worse. Can the Pharisees—blind to mercy, forgiveness and love, ever teach these divine attributes to the people of Israel?

The followers of Jesus Christ, on the other hand, will not be better than their master, but must seek perfection by trying to imitate Him. They must try always to do good, serve others, and offer forgiveness and mercy as God does. In this way can they imitate Jesus and seek perfection.

And to those who continuously tried to find something—anything—in our Lord’s conduct, ministry and life to condemn, He offered this comparison: “*And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother’s eye, but perceivest not the beam that is in thine own eye?*” Why do you seek out and find even the smallest of faults in others, when you have such grievous faults yourself?

It is the height of absurdity to pretend to judge others' lives when we are so fallible and error-prone ourselves. When we are unwilling to first correct our own errors, then we are altogether unfit to correct others' errors.

Christ had the only reasonable response. "*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.*" Fix your own errors, and then perhaps you can offer such criticism to others.

In the meantime, try not to hate those who aren't just like us. We may be more alike than we would like to admit. Those people, you know, do always want something. They want our respect, and our caring. They have fallen short—but then—so do we.

No—you can't trust them—and, truth be told, we have a hard time trusting ourselves as well.

Instead, try understanding others who are different. We don't have to agree with them, but surely we can try to treat them as our Lord would. That is, after all, what not judging others is. It is taking our instruction from our Lord and doing His will. Then perhaps we can say, "There *with* the grace of God go I."

Let us pray:

Dear Lord, it is so easy for us to fall into the trap of failing to show mercy. As you have commanded us to go and learn what mercy is,⁹ help us to show that mercy in our hearts and in our lives to all Your creation. Break down in us our hardness of heart and replace it with gentleness of spirit and a forgiving nature. This we ask of Your mercy. *Amen.*

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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 at Mass 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 St. Luke 6:37b-38 (RSV).

⁷ Colossians 3:14 (RSV).

⁸ *The Order for the Administration of the Lord's Supper*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER 67 (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

⁹ St. Matthew 9:13 (RSV).

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