

SERMON FOR EVENING PRAYER¹
THE FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY²

The Reverend Warren E. Shaw, Priest in Charge

The 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: "Judge not, and ye shall not be judged; condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven.... For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again."⁶ In the Name of the Father, and of the ☩ Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

Homily:

That text is from St. Luke's version of what we call "The Sermon on the Mount". I would like to begin with another text from that same sermon: "[A]s you wish that men would do to you; do so to them."⁷ In St. Matthew's version of this familiar text, Jesus adds these words: "for this is the law and the prophets."⁸

Jesus acknowledges that what is sometimes called "The Golden Rule" not only has roots in the Old Testament but is, in fact, a summary of Jewish ethics. Other rabbis before Jesus had said as much, but Jesus goes on to add a deeper dimension to the saying. He "ups the ante", you might say, by adding these words from today's Gospel: "Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not and you will not be condemned; forgive and you will be forgiven."

Jesus has been speaking about the great mercy of God, and how we should try to be like Him in our dealings with others. Now he is saying that when we ourselves face the judgment of God, we will be treated the way we have treated other people.

If we are kind and generous in our treatment of others, God will be kind and generous in His treatment of us. If we are willing to forgive people for what they may have done to us, God will also be ready to forgive us for all the things we have done to displease Him. “But”, says Jesus in another text from the same sermon, again from St. Matthew’s version, “if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” And so it is that we say in the prayer that Jesus taught us: “forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.”

Jesus once told a parable along the same lines. It was about a man who had an employee who owed him money. A lot of money. So much money there was no way that the employee would ever be able to pay it all back. In those days a man could be thrown into prison and his family sold into slavery if he couldn’t pay his debts. But the generous employer wrote off the debt and told his employee that he did not have to pay it.

That same employee, however, went to a fellow employee who owed him a small amount of money. He demanded immediate payment, and had the man thrown into prison when he couldn’t pay. When the employer heard about this, he called the first man back and had him thrown into prison. He treated him, in other words, as he had treated his fellow employee.

Such is the danger of treating other people differently than we ourselves hope to be treated by God. People in the Middle East are notorious for their ability to carry a grudge. They pass on their grievances from one generation to another. They never forget what someone may have done to them years or even centuries ago.

We have seen in our own day how the Jews have relentlessly pursued old men who, in their younger days, were part of Hitler’s holocaust campaign. But in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus challenges the conventional wisdom of His fellow Jews” “You have heard it said ... but I say to you.” He especially challenges the tendency to sustain a grudge: “But I say to you that hear, Love

your enemies, do good to those that hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.”

Now that’s not an easy thing to do, but Jesus Himself set the example as He hung on the cross. Most men who were crucified, and there were many, would curse the soldiers who carried out the execution. But Jesus prayed for them: “Father, forgive them. They don’t realize what they are doing.” He actually made excuses for the men who put Him to death. And the reason He did that is that He is, as St. Paul calls Him, “the image of the invisible God”.

The invisible God is merciful. The invisible God is gracious. The invisible God is compassionate, and in the verse that immediately precedes the opening of today’s Gospel passage, Jesus says that if we will follow His example, we too “will be sons of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the selfish.” “Be merciful”, He says, “even as your Father is merciful.”

Dear friends, God has given us the opportunity to set the standards by which we ourselves will be judged on the Day of Judgment. We can set the parameters that God Himself will observe in passing sentence on us. We set those standards and those parameters by the way in which we deal with the misdeeds of our fellow men here on earth. If we hold others to a strict standard and seek to extract revenge and inflict punishment, God will likewise hold us to a strict standard and extract revenge and inflict punishment on us. If we treat others as we ourselves would like to be treated, that is how we will be treated, perhaps not by others, but definitely by God.

“Judge not, and ye shall not be judged; condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven.... For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again.”

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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 delivered at Mass on Trinity IV, for which the Gospel appointed is the same as the Second Lesson at Evening Prayer today.

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 6:37, 38a (KJV).

⁷ St. Luke 6:31 (RSV).

⁸ St. Matthew 7:12b (RSV).