

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 Gospel: "Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful."⁶
In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Homily:

This expansion of the Great Commandment takes us from "*thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself*"⁷ to an even more specific instruction, namely that we should be merciful to others. It further defines the reason we should show mercy, because our Father is merciful. This commandment had been handed down to the people of Israel by God through Moses as He handed down the laws by which the people of Israel should conduct themselves: "*Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the LORD.*"⁸

This same message is repeated frequently in Scripture, giving us insight into its importance as a defining characteristic of God's people. In addition to the verse in Leviticus, three of the Gospel writers, Matthew, Mark and Luke, all quote our Lord referring to it.⁹ St. Paul compiles the meaning of several commandments into the one shorter one, "*and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.*"¹⁰

Later, in his Epistle to the Galatians, St. Paul suggests that all the law is fulfilled in the one commandment, that "*Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.*"¹¹ Each Sunday we reflect on this reality as we hear the Summary of the Law, "*The first and great commandment is this: thou shall love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and the second is like unto it;*

thou shall love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law, and the prophets."¹²

This is in truth the carrying out the great task that our Lord lays before us which we have discussed these last few weeks. This is loving our brothers, not in word or tongue, but in deed and truth as St. John directed us. This is living up to his challenge that, *"If God so loved us, we ought also to love one another."*¹³ Finally, St. James observes that if we *"fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well."*¹⁴

Being merciful involves loving one another, but it is more. If we are to be merciful one to another, then we must also always strive to be honest and fair to others in our dealings with them. In doing so, we offer the proper and appropriate respect for our fellow man and his condition that is expected of us. This is living up to the "Golden Rule" and "doing unto others as we would have them do unto us."

Indeed, we must be kind and generous to others, even when it is not reasonable to expect that they can do so in return. This is charity, which we are called upon to display towards all of God's children. Our reward in such a case comes from heaven and not from earthly recompense. This was the point of Our Lord's famous parable of the Good Samaritan, where the hated Samaritan stopped to aid the wounded Jew, an hereditary enemy of his people, and did so knowing he would very likely not even receive gratitude in exchange.

We should be willing to give to those in need, providing for necessity as we are able, without giving any consideration to what we may gain by doing so. Even harder for us is that we must be willing to forgive injury. It isn't our human nature to do so, but it is God's nature and so it is that which we must emulate and strive for.

We have been given several examples for how much mercy we need show. Our Lord told St. Peter that he should forgive not seven times, but seventy times seven. If we were to follow God's example, however, we would be reminded that *"his mercy endureth forever."*¹⁵ This is a difficult standard for us. It calls on us to

let go of our natural inclination to desire revenge and to pursue our human notions of justice. It means we must let go of anger and rage.

We have the greatest teacher in this regard. Remember that Jesus was mute before His accusers as He stood trial for His very life. Remember, too, His teaching to the crowd from the mount in Galilee: *“Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.”*¹⁶

Jesus reminds us that even our enemies are God’s children, and if we wish to be His children and follow His commands, then we must learn to forgive and to show mercy: *“Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.”*¹⁷

It isn’t easy. It isn’t our natural inclination. However, it is God’s way, and it is the way He wishes us to be.

Let us pray.

Grant, we beseech thee, Almighty God, that the words which we have heard this day with our outward ears, may, through thy grace, be so grafted inwardly in our hearts, that they may bring forth in us the fruit of good living and mercy, to the honour and praise of thy Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.¹⁸

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June 23, 2013

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, 2013.

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 6:36 (KJV).

⁷ St. Matthew 22:39 (KJV).

⁸ Leviticus 19:18 (KJV).

⁹ St. Matthew 5:43, 19:19, 22:39; St. Mark 12:31; St. Luke 10:27 (KJV).

¹⁰ Romans 13:9 (KJV).

¹¹ Galatians 5:14 (KJV).

¹² The Summary of the Law, from *The Order of Holy Communion*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER 69 (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

¹³ I John 4:11 (KJV).

¹⁴ James 2:8 (KJV).

¹⁵ Psalms 107:1 (KJV).

¹⁶ St. Matthew 5:38-39 (KJV).

¹⁷ St. Matthew 5:43-45 (KJV).

¹⁸ *Prayers and Thanksgivings: Collects*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER 49 (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

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