

## TRINITY 4 – LUKE 6:36-42

### “WHAT’S THE STANDARD OF MERCY?”

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“Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.” That’s the beginning verse of the Gospel text, and that’s really a summary of the sermon. But to get this right, we gotta know what mercy is. One of my dictionaries defined the Greek word as “the divinely required attitude of man to man.” In the Old Testament, the attitude of mercy is that it offers undeserved kindness. Certainly, that’s how our text sees it. God’s disciples are merciful, undeservedly kind, to other people. But why are we merciful? Because we were first shown mercy by our heavenly Father. Mercy given by God is focused on salvation at the end of your life – certainly, you’re given God’s mercy here and now, but the goal of God’s mercy is to bring sinners into himself for eternity.

But now that we understand what mercy is, that it’s undeserved kindness, and that it is first given to us by God, and that it is supposed to be shared with others, we gotta ask ourselves – what’s the standard of mercy? I mean, we shouldn’t just allow people to walk all over our mercy, right? Kindness towards others can only take so much before it retaliates with fear and condemnation, right? Should we refuse someone mercy, because we don’t think they deserve it? Should we refuse mercy to someone when they don’t align with our political views? Should we refuse mercy to someone when they’ve committed a crime and are in jail? Should

we refuse mercy to someone who you feel, may take advantage of your mercy? Should we refuse mercy to someone at the street corner begging for work, change, or a meal, if all we think they'll do with our charity is go buy drugs or alcohol? Should we refuse mercy to family and friends to keep a five-year grudge going? Should we refuse mercy to someone if they don't reach the moral standard that we've set for ourselves?

If you answered yes to any of those questions, then you are a blind man, leading another blind man into a pit. You have placed yourself, the disciple, above the teacher – which is God Himself.

In the Gospel text, Jesus tells us to not judge or condemn people, and we will not be judged or condemned by God. What does it mean to judge or condemn someone? Sinners judge others based on a misunderstanding of God's standards. When sinners give judgment, the standard of judgement is strict – instead of an attitude of kindness towards other sinners, a conceited attitude is often taken up toward sinners. A Pharisaical attitude is adopted, and God's mercy is misrepresented. And what is God's standard of judgment? Well, it isn't as if God delights in the judgment of man, but God delights in showing mercy (Ezekiel 18:32). That's who God is, He's merciful. And that's who we should be as we represent God to the world.

Jesus also urges us to forgive, and we will be forgiven on the last day as we are forgiven now. Give to others, and we will be given the gifts of God in return. Again, this is the attitude of mercy. Followers of Jesus should be as he is – for nothing is out of reach of God's mercy.

But all this talk about being merciful, judging, condemning, forgiving, and giving isn't to say that sin goes unpunished. Paul writes in Romans 12:19 **"Never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay."** The Lord will take care of sin on the last day – and it's not your duty as a Christian to exercise God's end day judgement in real time, making other people's lives a living hell.

Because your standard is different than God's standard. God is merciful. We demand retaliation. God gives life. We demand retribution at the cost of life. God is limitless love. Our love has limitations set on it.

So, what's God's standard? On judgement day, **"whoever believes and is baptized will be saved. Whoever does not believe will be condemned"** – Mark 16:16. But that's judgment day. Jesus says the standard of mercy we use now is the standard of mercy He will use toward us on judgment day in the Gospel reading. Jesus says, **"For the measure you use it will be measured back to you."** But that's his end times judgment standard, what's His standard for mercy *now*? Well, for whose sins did Jesus die? John 3:16-17 – **"For God so loved the (Pause) WORLD that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him."** The Father sent His Son Jesus to die for everyone – the whole world! God's mercy is limitless, and no one is out of reach of God's mercy! He has mercy on the righteous and the unrighteous. On the merciful and the merciless.

On sinners and the self-righteous. Christ died on the cross to give his mercy to you. And He uses His cross of mercy to rid you of that log stuck in your own eye, so that His mercy may have its way with you, and you'd be merciful to your neighbor. Your eyes will have the clear vision to see that your neighbor who you may not like, needs your mercy. It's like the quote in the bulletin next to the Nicene Creed puts it – God meets us where we are to give us mercy, but He isn't content that we remain there. Instead, habits of self-destruction and self-absorption are replaced with habits of mercy. There's never a shortage of mercy to be shown in the world, especially now.

If you're not sure how exactly to share mercy in this merciless world, read the texts for today again. Paul frames our epistle lesson with this admonition: "let love be genuine." How? "Bless those who persecute you. And do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with each other. Do not be haughty and conceited, but associate with the lowly – those who are outcasts and mistreated. Don't repay evil with evil. Do what is honorable in the sight of everybody and live peacefully with everybody, not just your clan." If you need more practical examples, Paul goes on to say "If your *enemy* is hungry, feed him. If he is thirsty, give him something to drink." Generally speaking, "overcome evil with good."

Be like Joseph in the Old Testament lesson. Even though His eleven brothers tried to kill him and sold him into Egyptian slavery, Joseph forgave them! Because even though they meant evil against Joseph because

they were jealous of Him, God meant it for good. Because Joseph was able to save a lot of people during a season of famine – including God’s covenant people from Abraham’s lineage: Joseph’s own family! Joseph didn’t repay the evil of his brothers with evil of his own, he didn’t let hatred and wrath get in the way of love and God’s will. Instead, Joseph was merciful, because His God is even more merciful. It would appear here, that mercy has no limit. Mercy can still be shown to those who’d rather have you dead. Jesus shows this perfectly, pleading with the Father to show mercy and forgiveness to those who crucified Him: “Father forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

I once heard a story of limitless mercy from an ICU nurse. As an ICU nurse, you work on plenty of people who’ve done bad things – criminals and the like. One day after work, the ICU nurse is watching the nightly news with her family, and there’s a story about a criminal who having been arrested, had to go to the hospital for injuries. While watching the T.V. news story, the ICU nurse casually said, “Oh, I worked on him today.” The family exploded with disbelief that their mom could’ve worked on this criminal. She said, “Yeah, I worked on him. He was handcuffed to the bedrail and there were a couple policemen in the room also.” But she also went on to say that even though she may have been tempted to not treat him with her very best care since he was a criminal, she still treated him with mercy, love, undeserved kindness. If she didn’t try her hardest, no one probably would’ve noticed. Nonetheless, she saw his life as having value, because that’s how God sees her.

So, what should be your standard of mercy? If someone should bear the image of God, they are worthy of your mercy. Who bears the image of God? Everyone. God has created everyone and given them his image. And they're all worthy of God's love and mercy, and are shown love through the cross. So, to truly represent God to the world, our mercy needs to extend to those we'd consider unworthy of our undeserved kindness.

But to give, you must first receive. So, for the Prayers of the Church which we are about to pray, we will pray responsively the Litany listed on the blue insert in your bulletin. What do we ask for in this prayer? The mercy of God which cleanses us from all our sin, and rids us of our logs in our eyes. Our Lord is faithful and merciful to give such wonderful gifts.

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