

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

The portion of Scripture before us today is found in the Gospel according to Saint Luke the sixth chapter beginning at the thirty-sixth verse, and we read in Jesus' name:

"Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful. ³⁷ "Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. ³⁸ "Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you." ³⁹ And He spoke a parable to them: "Can the blind lead the blind? Will they not both fall into the ditch? ⁴⁰ "A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is perfectly trained will be

like his teacher. ⁴¹ "And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not perceive the plank in your own eye? ⁴² "Or how can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me remove the speck that is in your eye,' when you yourself do not see the plank that is in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck that is in your brother's eye.

Heavenly Father, these are Your words and therefore they are the truth. We pray, Lord, that You would increase our faith through them. Amen.

Dear Redeemed by the Blood of the Lamb,

Who is Jesus talking to in this text? Is Jesus speaking to the world and its sinful ways or is He talking to you? Is Jesus talking to Pharisees about their sin or is he talking to the disciples?

So often this text is taken and spoken from one sinner to another, is it not? The world quotes this to Christians. Christians quote it to other Christians or even the world. One sinner quotes this verse to another sinner... and yet that is not what happens the first time it is uttered.

Jesus Christ, who had just come down from praying and had gathered and named His twelve disciples now speaks... to them. Jesus, here, is speaking to His disciples and He is speaking to the multitudes of those who had come to Him. These words, as we can gather from Christ, are meant for us, for those who are following Christ and we need to hear them. Jesus begins with a very simple and yet a very demanding message to each and every one of us: Be merciful! Why? ***Because your Father is merciful.***

Yes, God is merciful to all people isn't He? He makes the rain fall on both the wicked and the faithful. He feeds both the wicked and the faithful. He keeps safe from war and destruction both the wicked and the faithful. God is merciful to all people, so why aren't you?

As Gerhard says, "***God loves mankind before and above all, yea, despite all that we deserve; and it is also in this way we should love our enemies. God's mercy is without deceit; His love is from His heart without distinction of persons, and He lets His sun rise over the evil and the good. This is also how the nature of our mercy should be, that without distinction of the person we sincerely love all men.***" And then ask yourself: am I living up to this standard? Do I show mercy to all people? Do I forgive and bless all people regardless of how they treat me? Do I show forth the love and mercy that God has shown towards me? And

if we are being honest with ourselves the answer is a resounding “NO.”

We do not show mercy as we should. Instead of being merciful to people it is very easy to be judgmental of them.

One of my favorite examples of being judgmental and not showing the love and mercy of God is from a book about business, of all things. A man tells a story of being on a subway. While he is riding in relative quiet, a man with a couple children board. The children are running up and down and yelling wildly. They are climbing and disrupting the other passengers. The teller of the story gets upset and tells the father that he really should control his kids... the father turns to the man and asks him how he would like that done as the children's mother had just died, and the father didn't exactly know how to handle it.

Like a two-by-four to the face. The man did not say another word while on that subway. And I wonder how many of us would've acted the same way. Instead of trying to understand this man, we judged him as an unfit parent and one who needed to get his act together. We didn't see him as a brand-new widower who didn't know how to address his children.

And while this story might be a little harsh to you and to me... what about some real life examples?

In the explanation of the eighth commandment in our catechisms we are told: ***We should fear and love God that we do not tell lies about our neighbor, betray him, or give him a bad name, but defend him, speak well of him, and take his words and actions in the kindest possible way.*** We don't do this and we know it. We hear of a couple seeking a divorce and we judge... but

we don't know that she drinks every night and has been abusing the children from day one. We hear on the news about all those people who are ruining the economy by being on welfare and getting food stamps and we judge them as deadbeats too lazy to get a real job... but we don't realize that a goodly portion of our men and women in the armed forces are on those rolls as are many in not too lucrative fields, such as the ministry. We hear of a member of our church who was seen walking out of a bar at 3am with someone who wasn't his wife and we judge them... but we don't realize he was her sponsor and she just hit the bottom after losing her job.

We are really good at judging things that are not within our realm of judgment. You see, it is one thing to judge according to God's word and His commandments... it is another thing to judge people by how you would want them to live and believe and do. If you

are using God's word, great; if you are using yourself as an example... the blind leading the blind. One sinner trying to make another sinner like them... but not in God's image. And we do this. But what did God do?

God saw our first parents sin and He knew our condition was lost... but He did not condemn us at that moment. No, instead God was merciful to you and to me. God made a promise to our first parents and to us, He promised to send a Savior. A Savior who would come into this world and would save us, redeem us, from all of our sins and all of our wrongs. And Jesus Christ came into this world and He lived a perfect life.

Yes, in this life Jesus did judge, but He did so according to His standard, according to God's standard. For Christ to judge is a far cry from me and you judging. So yes, during His life, Jesus did judge. He brought the law upon the people, but most importantly He

brought them the Gospel. Regardless of the judging that Jesus may have done, He made sure that the gospel was always attached to it.

The gospel that tells us about our Savior who came into this world for us. The gospel that tells us that our Savior lived a perfect life for us. The gospel that tells us that Jesus, our Savior, died for us. This same gospel was spread before Jesus was born, during His life, and after His death. It is our Savior Jesus Christ who has saved us from all of our sins. It is Jesus Christ who has saved us from all of our false and wrong judging. It is Jesus Christ who has brought the mercy of God to us personally.

The mercy of God that guarantees us the forgiveness of our sins. This mercy of God is shown to us in Jesus hanging on the cross paying for all of our sins. This mercy of God is given to you when you read and hear His

word. This mercy of God is placed on your head and your heart through the holy waters of baptism. This mercy of God is placed in your mouth when you come forward and receive the Lord's Supper. This mercy of God, the forgiveness of our sins is given to all of His faithful children; and now through faith in our Savior we have this forgiveness and we have heaven waiting for us when this life is over.

About this text Gerhard tells us, “***Yet, we must examine why Christ places such emphasis on the heart rather than on the external works of charity. He does not say: ‘Do the works of love, be diligent in the works of charity,’ but He says: ‘Be merciful.’ This is so because He wishes that the external works of virtue will flow from the innermost reaches of the hearts of His people. All the external works of virtue receive their strength and effect from the noble, inner workings of the soul.***”

When we are merciful, as our Father in heaven is merciful, we will not need to worry about falsely judging or condemning. Judging and condemning is best left to God and His word; rather, our reaction can be one of mercy and compassion with people. If they are blatantly sinning, we can still show the love of Christ to them. Yes, those sinning will need to hear the law (which is being loving to them) but they also need the gospel if they are going to make any real change.

And so it is with us, we need to internalize the gospel message... we need to have it in our minds and on our hearts. We need to be merciful, for when we are truly merciful to others, the works will flow forth. And instead of being a blind guide who uses ourself as the measure, we will be a true guide using God and His word as our measure.

And before you worry about being too forgiving of people, consider all that Jesus Christ has done for you and how often He forgives you your sin... and realize that you will never out-forgive Jesus Christ, and thanks be to God for that. He has forgiven me and with this forgiveness He asks that I forgive others... dear God, what else could I do?

Dear friends in Christ, very often people wish to take this verse out of context... but not today. Jesus is speaking to His disciples, He wants each and every one of them to know the dangers in the world and He mentions this point: Be merciful. We do not do this of our own accord. We are not merciful because it is easy or because it is fun. We are not merciful because everyone deserves it and we are so willing to hand it out... no, we are merciful because our Father is merciful.

Thanks be to God that He has had mercy on me. Thanks be to God that He allows me to forgive others and show them the same mercy that has been shown to me. And thanks be to God that His mercy has been given to me... that mercy through which God has offered His Son as the atoning sacrifice for me and assures me of heaven.

Thanks be to God. Amen.