

“Be Merciful, Even as Your Father is Merciful” Luke 6:27-38

As this is the seventh Sunday after Epiphany, we don't get this deep into the season very often. So when I looked at the hymns for this week, I noticed in my Lutheran Service Book Hymn Selection Guide (which gives a group of 30 hymns or so for each week of the church year which contain references to the readings or which are appropriate for the season), and I noticed that I didn't have any notes for this week from past cycles through Series C – which we are in this year.

So, out of curiosity, I looked through my computer files, and I have never preached on this text here in Quincy. So, being curious, I looked through my sermons from Pana – nothing. So I looked through my sermons from Mellen, the ones at least that I have – nothing. However, mixed in with the Mellen sermons was one from my 4th year at the Seminary – one that I preached in Sandusky, MI in 1995. I had to read through it. Then I repented. Those poor people were so kind.

In our reading from Luke's Gospel, which I apparently haven't preached on since Seminary, we hear Jesus preaching a strange message – not strange to us, because we are familiar with these words, but think about

it. “Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you...If someone strikes you on the cheek, turn to him the other also. . . . lend to others expecting nothing in return.” This is a strange message. Again, not because we have never heard it before. On the contrary, this is a passage that gets quoted all of the time. In fact, we just covered Matthew’s account of Jesus preaching these words in my 5th and 6th grade religion class at St. James.

The reason that this is such a strange message for all the people of this world is because it points in the absolute opposite direction that the world points us in. The slogan has been around for a long time: “Don’t get mad, get even.” The world tells us that “He who laughs last, laughs best.” And my personal favorite is that “revenge is a dish best served cold.”

The sinful mind is a devious, dark, hateful thing. We love to get the last word. We don’t like being taken advantage of. Truth be told, we don’t necessarily like it when other people have success, especially when we seem to get the short end of the stick. Everything in our human nature says, “I’m #1, my family and friends are very important to me, but the rest of the people better not get in my way.”

That is the way of the world. That is not the way of God. That is not the path that Christ has laid out for us. Jesus says, “Love your enemies...Pray for those who mistreat you...If someone strikes you on the cheek, turn to him the other also.” Our sinful heart tells us, “Get even.” Jesus tells us, “Be merciful, event as your Father is merciful.”

The world points us in this direction. Christ points us to His cross, and to His Table to receive the Sacrament of His body and blood. Christ points us to the love, mercy, grace, and forgiveness that only God can give.

We can't keep God's Law – not even a little bit of it. What Jesus tells us to do here in Luke Chapter 6 are requirements that none of us can fulfill in our lives. No matter how "Good" we think we are, as we time and time again see, none of us even come close to doing what God demands. So what can we do? It's really not a question of what we can do, it is a question of what can God do for us?

The Holy Spirit has taken each of you, turned you completely around, and pointed you toward Christ's cross. Christ has shown you His pierced hands and feet. You have been washed clean in the water of Baptism and in the Blood of Christ. Christ has fulfilled God's Law for us, and has suffered our punishment, so that we are declared righteous by God.

God has forgiven you and turned you completely around saving you from the fires of Hell, pointing you toward Himself and away from the sin of this world. God rescued us and headed us in the opposite direction of the wickedness that would only lead us to death and destruction. God has put us on His path of righteousness. He has saved us from death. He has forgiven our sins. And today, we hear Jesus say, "Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful."

Even though our works do nothing to make us saved (or more saved – whatever that would mean), however, God does want us to show a genuine

care and concern for all the people in our lives, even our enemies. Christ tells us to remember that we were once God's enemies.

In Verse 35, Jesus reminds us that we were ungrateful, evil people to whom God showed great kindness. Christ says that even though none of us deserve it, our Father in heaven has shown mercy toward us and promised us a great reward in heaven.

Even on our best day, we could never give to another human being any measure of kindness even similar to what God has done for us. And give thanks to God that He does not think in the same ways that our minds think.

We say, "Don't get mad, get even!" God says, "When I was angry with the people of this world for breaking My Law, I sent My Son, My only Son to suffer their punishment for them and die on the cross."

Rather than taking revenge on us, God has sent His Holy Spirit into our lives to take us by the hand and lead us to safety. He has lead us to the baptismal font. He leads us to the Lord's Table, and He keeps us pointed in the direction of Christ's cross, never to look back at the death and destruction behind us.

Today, we join together to share in God's Word and His Sacrament, and we pray that God would continue to show us kindness. And we pray that the Holy Spirit would continue to give us strength that we might show mercy to others as God has shown mercy to us. Amen.