

Luke 6:36–42 (Trinity IV)
Kaiserslautern Ev. Luth. Ch.
July 10, 2022

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

Dearly bought hearers by the blood of Jesus Christ,

Perhaps no Gospel text is taken out of context more than the Gospel text appointed for today. “Judge not.” If non-Christians know one passage from Scripture, it’s probably this one, or at least a summary of it. You hear it cited anytime the Church takes a stand against injustice in this sinful world. “Judge not” is often a way to stop the discussion. When sin is called out for what it is, “judge not” becomes a trump card, an excuse to let almost anything and everything slide. By the world’s standards, “judge not” sounds pretty good. A religion about not judging is a religion basically everyone could get behind. “You do you,” “live and let live,” tolerance, acceptance, “judge not.” For today’s world all those things go together and make for a quiet and peaceable life. But is that really what Jesus intends when He says: “judge not”? Is Jesus telling us to stay quiet when sin is condoned or even praised? Is Jesus telling us to refrain from absolutely all judgment? No. “Judge not” is only one part of the larger principle: “Be merciful as your Father is merciful.” As God the Father is merciful to us in Christ Jesus, so we in Christ Jesus are to be merciful to those around us by not judging and condemning, but by forgiving and giving generously to all who are in need. “Judge not” does not mean pretending sin is not sin. “Judge not” is about treating others the way God has treated us, by recognizing that our sins and the sins of the world were paid for by Jesus on the cross.

When you hear “judge not” used as an excuse to overlook sin, or to keep quiet when sin is called out in the Church and in the world, keep in mind that this is not the only passage that speaks about judgment. It is not a blanket command to “judge not” but must be considered in

context. In John 7:24, Jesus tells the crowd: “Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment.” In 1 Corinthians 5:3, the Apostle Paul judges members of the congregation for sexual immorality. He says: “I have already pronounced judgment on the one who did such a thing. Paul then says it is the responsibility of the Christian congregation to judge those in its midst: “Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge?” (1 Cor 5:12), asks Paul. In Matthew 7:15, Jesus says to “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves.” Judgment is required in the Church to guard against false teachers. As you can see, it’s not as simple as a blanket “judge not.” In the world and in the Church, a certain judgment is not only permitted but required.

So what makes the difference between when we are to judge and when we are to refrain from judging? The difference is in distinguishing between the person and the office. In this life, God places all people into very specific offices, or vocations. God calls us to different tasks in different contexts. In the Small Catechism, Luther talks about the “Table of Duties,” or “certain passages of Scripture for various holy orders and positions, admonishing them about their duties and responsibilities.” Pastors and people, government and citizens, husbands, wives, parents, children, workers, employers, youth, widows, and all people are placed by God into their specific roles, or offices. Oftentimes part of the office God places us into is to use godly judgment. For example, according to Romans 13, the one who holds civil authority “does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God’s servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer.” The role of government is to judge between good and bad and to reward or punish accordingly. Those given that role, or that office, are to judge. It’s the same way for parents judging the conduct of their children, or employers judging the work of their employees. Christians are to use God’s Word to judge what is being taught in the church and flee from false teachers. Within certain

vocations judgment is necessary, and without that good judgment utter chaos along with false doctrine and practice would ensue. When those who are called to judge rightly neglect their duty, they are doing more harm than good. The offices, or the vocations, God places us into require us to use good judgment.

On the other hand, as individual Christians we are called in principle not to judge and condemn, but to forgive and to give. So what does that mean? This is just like what Jesus taught earlier with the Golden rule: “as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them” (Luke 6:31). It’s a principle of mercy and generosity, a way of life that gives others the benefit of the doubt because that’s exactly what we would want for ourselves. If someone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also. If someone takes your cloak, give him your tunic as well. Give to everyone who begs from you. As Christians, we are called upon to go the extra mile and respond with grace. And of course this is not just worldly wisdom, although life would be much easier were we to live according to Jesus’s dictates. It’s all too easy to let our lives be consumed with adding up the offenses against us, holding grudges, and getting even. But what a miserable life that is! Jesus offers a better way, a road less traveled.

So when Jesus says: “judge not,” “condemn not,” He’s saying to treat others the way you would like to be treated. We don’t have to get much into what this judgmental attitude looks like because you know it all too well. When you’re chatting with friends or neighbors and the conversation turns into airing someone else’s dirty laundry, when you begin sharing information about someone who’s not present, you quickly see what that turns into. It’s so easy to tear others down and highlight their sins because then we start to seem better, or at least we start to seem normal. And it’s even easier when the other person isn’t there to defend himself! This tendency of our human nature is the reason God gave us the 8th Commandment: You shall not bear false

witness against your neighbor. . . We should fear and love God so that we don't tell lies about our neighbor, betray him, slander him, or hurt his reputation, but defend him, speak well of him, and explain everything in the kindest way, that is, to put the best construction on our neighbor's actions, to steer the conversation in a different direction. There's no room to judge the sins of others because we, too, come before God as poor beggars and miserable sinners.

Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven. As Christians our posture is to be one of love and forgiveness towards our neighbor, helping and supporting in every spiritual and physical need: "give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you." Here Jesus is using an example from the marketplace. If you give abundantly you will receive abundantly. If you fill your neighbor's cup to the full, your cup will run over too. Give generously and you will receive generously. Jesus is talking about physical things here, daily bread, but He includes sustenance for the soul. Forgive others when they hurt you, and in turn, you too, will be forgiven by our heavenly Father. Just like we pray everyday in the Lord's Prayer: forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.

Sometimes people start to think about the commands in our Gospel Lesson this morning as conditions for receiving something from God. "If I don't judge others I won't be judged. If I don't condemn others I won't be condemned. If I forgive others, God will forgive me. If I give to others, I'll get something in return." But remember the overarching principle from v. 36: "Be merciful, *even as your Father is merciful.*" In Ephesians 2, Paul says that "By nature we were children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together

with Christ.” Or in Romans 5: “God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” That’s the whole reason Jesus came, not to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him” (John 3:17). In the death and resurrection of Jesus, God is merciful to us. He no longer judges and condemns us. Instead, God forgives our sins and cleanses us from all unrighteousness. In Jesus Christ, God gives us all good things and apart from Him we have nothing (Psalm 16:2). As Christians whose lives have been transformed by the boundless love and mercy of God, we no longer need to view those around us with hostility. Instead of seeing our neighbor according to his sins, we see him as God does, a brother for whom Christ died (1 Cor 8:11). Instead of ignoring our neighbor’s need, we can provide for Him even as God provides for us in Christ Jesus.

At certain times God gives us the responsibility of judging and condemning for the sake of preserving what is good, whether that be as parents, employers, Christians, or whatever. Wherever God has placed you, fulfill your God-given responsibility according to God’s Word. But in your day-to-day interactions with others, keep in mind how God is merciful to you. The blood of His Son covers all your sins, and so you are accounted righteous before God. There is no judgment, there is no condemnation, for you who are in Christ Jesus (Rom 8:1). And if God won’t judge us, how can we sit as judges over other sinners, magnifying their faults and downplaying our own? If God doesn’t condemn us, how dare we condemn others and show them no mercy? If God forgives our sins and gives us all good things, how could we not forgive others and deal generously with them? Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. We stand for the Offertory.