

Luke 6:36–42
Trinity IV
Kaiserslautern Ev. Luth. Ch.
June 23, 2024

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,

The Christian life is all about love. This point might seem uncontroversial on the surface. Mercy, forgiveness, love—the world also uses these terms. Whether they know it or not, people are still driving on the fumes of the once plentiful fuel of Christian culture and values. All the mighty churches that have fallen away from God’s Word continue using these words—mercy, forgiveness, love. The world loves what sounds like the Gospel. Love is love. It’s all about love. Live and let live. That’s how the world tries to grapple with mercy and forgiveness. As a matter of fact, the main reason persecution comes today in our society is not because the Church upholds the Gospel—the good news of Jesus Christ. Today, persecution comes when the Church upholds God’s Law of love.

When a Christian dares to say that God has standards and that He expects us to live according to those standards, suffering will come. If you even begin to intimate that someone else’s life choices might not be God-pleasing, you’re going to hear about it. If in love you warn a sinner to turn from his wicked ways, you will be thought to be unforgiving, unmerciful, unloving, and hypocritical. You will be ostracized by friends, family, coworkers, and society at large if you don’t happily go along with their redefinition of God’s created order. I’m referring to so-called gay marriage, feminism, transgenderism, and everything included in pride month right now. If you’ve not been confronted by these things in any way, especially during the month of June, then you’re either isolated from our culture and I envy you, or you’ve already drunk so

deeply from the poisoned wells that you're blinded to reality according to God's Word and your life is more conformed to this fallen world than to the Word of God. Christians are susceptible to this and repentance is called for. To truly understand love, mercy, and forgiveness, we must look not to the world but to the Word of God. The Bible is the measure of all things, not our culture of death masquerading as the good life. The Bible is where we must turn.

Our Gospel text this morning follows right upon our LORD's commandment to "love your enemies." God's Law is all about love. The first table of God's Law says: Love the LORD your God with all your heart, soul, and mind. The second table of God's Law says: Love your neighbor as yourself. This is the entire Law of God. Love God. Love other people. Love is the fulfilling of the Law. Jesus says: "If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners do the same." The pagans know to love. But to love even one's enemies goes against our entire sense of justice. Yet that is what God calls us to. To love those who love you is natural. To love those who don't love you is supernatural. Pagans will help as long as that help is reciprocated, or as long as it makes them feel good in some way. Then their love dries up. But a Christian must be like a spring that never dries up. Apart from God, this is impossible.

Jesus says: "Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful." How is God merciful? God is merciful in that He seeks and saves the lost. He loves those who don't love Him. He cares for those who care nothing for Him. He saves those who are dead in their trespasses and sins. When man fell into sin, God determined to become man, that He might die for the sins of the world. While we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. In Jesus Christ, God died not for the godly, but for the ungodly. He came to accept those who rejected God. God shows His

love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. This is the mercy of God. It's a mercy that helps those who don't deserve it, a mercy that rains down blessings upon believers as well as unbelievers, a mercy that seeks the best for others even if it means becoming unpopular or coming across as unloving. This is the mercy Christians are called to and it's a mercy you can only show because you have been shown this mercy. In Jesus Christ, God is constantly merciful to you. He doesn't hold your past sins against you. He forgives you and welcomes you back into his arms. And in mercy, God shows you a better way. In Jesus Christ, you are to be merciful towards others. Don't hold someone's past wrongs against them. Forgive the repentant sinner and welcome them back into your life. Have mercy on those who doubt. Save others by snatching them out of the fire; to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh (Jude 23).

Next, Jesus speaks a word that we know is so often taken out of context today: "Judge not, and you will not be judged." "Who am I to judge?" That's how the world wants you to look at open sin and public shame. Who are you to judge? You're a child of God. You've been given the standard of God's Word. In fact, you're commanded to judge. In John 7:24, Jesus says: "Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment." That is, judge according to the standard of God's Word. Judge and condemn sin for what it is, first in yourself and then in others. Judge and condemn sin that the sinner might repent, turning from his wicked ways and turning towards the free forgiveness that is in Jesus Christ alone. "Judge not" means don't use someone else's sin to distract from your own sin. Take care of the log in your own eye, and then help your brother with the speck in his eye. Confess your sins, receive forgiveness. But then help your brother to also confess his sins and receive forgiveness. The most hateful thing you can do

is look past the sins of others and pretend they're not a big deal. The most loving thing you can do is help a sinner see the path to God in Jesus Christ.

It's similar with the next statement: "Condemn not, and you will not be condemned." This does not mean to ignore sin. The church must condemn sin while at the same time leaving God room to work in people's lives. The Church is called to proclaim repentance and forgiveness of sins in the name of Jesus to all nations (Luke 24:47). To preach repentance means to condemn sin, to call it out for what it is and to acknowledge the truth that any transgression of God's Law deserves eternal death. To preach repentance means to hold up the mirror of God's Holy Law that all sinners might recognize where they've gone wrong. God's Law is properly used as a diagnostic test so people can actually see in their own lives what the problem is. A person who doesn't recognize the problem also can't recognize the solution. A sinner who thinks he's fine also thinks he doesn't need Jesus. But he couldn't be farther from the truth. God's Law must condemn the sinner, and you, the church, are part of that process. That's one reason the world hates you. As models of repentance and faith, you prick the consciences of unbelievers. Your entire existence condemns them.

"Judge not" and "condemn not" are not about ignoring sin. Rather, they are commandments reminding us of our common sinful condition and warning us against thinking we're any better on our own than other sinners. "Judge not" and "condemn not" are reminders not to compare our lives to the lives of other sinners. Even the worst criminals try to console themselves that other people are worse. We don't compare ourselves to other sinners but to the Law of God. And then we see that all are judged. All are condemned. All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. All people are sinners, though in different ways. But there is no sin that's so big God can't forgive it. No sinner is so far gone that we should stop trying to call him

to repentance and faith. There is still room at our table for sinners who long for the Savior, Jesus Christ.

Next come the positive commands: “Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to you.” This is not tit for tat, you scratch my back and I’ll scratch yours kind of love, the way the world views it. The world knows forgiveness to a degree. The world says: “if you overlook my mistakes, I’ll overlook yours. Maybe.” The natural man loves giving, so long as there’s something in it for me. Not necessarily an equal gift, but at least recognition, honor for being a good person, accolades of some kind. In the world, Christian values are limited and become a transaction. But God calls us to a higher life, to His life. God is merciful to you in Jesus Christ, so reflect His unlimited mercy. God forgives you, so forgive others as you have been forgiven. God gives you all good things, so give to others generously: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over. The LORD causes His blessings to rain down on the righteous and the unrighteous without distinction, which is the same life He calls you to. God’s blessings to you are superabundant and He wants to work through you to bless other people. Don’t be stingy in showing forgiveness or in caring for others. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you.

In Jesus Christ you have everything. As a Christian, you know this. God is merciful to you in the death of Jesus Christ. God no longer condemns, God no longer judges you, because He condemned and judged Jesus in your place. He forgives you your sins for the sake of Jesus and grants you new life by the power of His resurrection from the dead. Be merciful even as your Father is merciful. Don’t condemn a repentant sinner, don’t judge a repentant sinner, but forgive as you have been forgiven in Jesus Christ. He is all and in all. “Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience,

bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony” (Col 3:12–14). 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.