

Trinity 4
Luke 6:36-42
God's Mercy
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Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Last Sunday in the early morning a man went into a club in Orlando, Florida and committed the greatest mass shooting in modern US history. Upwards to fifty individuals were killed and even more hospitalized by the spray of bullets from the gun of a madman. This tragedy threw the country into confusion. Many seek someone to blame; someone to hate for this.

This particular incident causes confusion for some because of the target of the carnage. The young radicalized Muslim went into a so called "gay" night club, because he wanted to kill homosexuals. Because the Bible is very clear that homosexuality is a sin, people do not want to hear what the Church, which holds the Bible to be God's very word, has to say. In fact, Christians have been blamed for this crime because of their so-called "hateful rhetoric." And people have placed blame and hate on different groups. One thing that is certain to be neglected in all this is the very Gospel. So, let us hear it.

"Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful." God is merciful. We must understand this first of all. What does it mean to be merciful? If we do not know what it means to be merciful, we will not understand this Gospel lesson. Nor will we understand how to react to the terror from Orlando or the carnage that is sure to come in the future as sinful people will continue to kill each other until Christ returns to put an end to the sword.

This lesson is about the most misunderstood and misapplied passages in all of Scripture. "Judge not, and you will not be judged." "Don't judge." That is the response given to any Christian, who states God's Law. Many even find some sort of comfort thinking, "well, if I don't judge between right and wrong, God won't judge me." Well, let us dismiss this misunderstanding quickly. Jesus does not say that no one should judge. Quite the contrary. He appoints rulers and judges to do just that. Parents must judge their

children. Judges must judge cases brought before them. Pastors must judge what is right and wrong. And every Christian must discern between true and false teaching.

But when Jesus says, "Do not judge." He is not speaking to parents, pastors, judges, and other rulers according to their vocations as judge. He is speaking to Christians according to their calling as Christians. Do not judge. Why? Because God did not judge you! Instead, he showed mercy to you.

And what did God's mercy look like? Did he just ignore sin? Does he change his judgment based on popular opinion? Is God embarrassed by what St. Paul and his other Apostles wrote when they addressed sins that are now widely accepted? No, God's mercy does not forgo justice. His mercy does not undo his divine law. God does not call evil good or good evil. Rather, God's mercy looks like this. God sends his Son Jesus Christ into the world to be punished for your sins. God does not judge you nor condemn you, because he judged and condemned Jesus in your place. Christ says, "God did not send his Son into the World to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him." (John 3:17)

You deserved to be punished for your sins. You deserve to be judged and condemned. But God had *mercy* on you and he punished his Son in your place. That is what mercy is. God paying your debt. It is like the servant, who owed his master a debt that would take several lifetimes to pay off. The master forgave the debt, intending for his servant to also forgive the debts owed to him. So God forgives your debt of sin and expects you also to forgive those who sin against you.

This is the Christian ethic. Do unto others as you would want them to do unto you. What would you want to be done unto you? Well, if you are a Christian you would want to be forgiven. So "forgive one another as God in Christ forgave you!" (Ephesians 4:32)

You do not become a Christian by not judging, or forgiving, or giving. You become a Christian by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit makes Christians through God's Word. Braxton and Chris are Christians, because God through his Word created faith in their hearts and poured his Spirit onto them through Water and his Word. Rather, this text teaches Christians how to behave like Christians. Christ says, "A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher."

Well, you are Christ's disciples. He is your teacher. You are being trained to be like him. What is Christ like? He is merciful, forgiving. He does not judge or condemn, but lays down his life for our sins.

We as Christians are commanded to be merciful, because God is merciful to us. So how are we merciful to others? Certainly shooting and killing people isn't merciful. That is murder! And none of us has been given the authority to carry out God's judgment in that way. The terrorist, who killed all those people certainly was not given the right by God to murder. And yet, it is not merciful to march in a gay pride parade and in other ways accept homosexuality as a good thing. It might make them happy for a while, but that is not merciful. God is merciful. He showed mercy on homosexuals by punishing his Son for the sin of homosexuality, just as he punished his Son for the sin of murder, even mass murder. Just as he punished his Son for your sins.

Jesus tells us the blind can't lead the blind. And it is hypocritical for a man with a beam in his eye to try to pick out a speck in his brother's eye. What Jesus is telling us is to repent of our sins. Do not point out other people's faults, while ignoring your own massive fault. In the same way, do not condemn people for their mole hill of sins, while ignoring that God forgave your mountain of sins.

But to show mercy is not to call sin good. To be merciful is not to accept sin as a good thing. To show mercy is to speak truth in love. To forgive. To pray. To be patient, that is long suffering. To share Christ.

The loss of life in Orlando is a tragedy. Lives were cut short. People, created in the image of God; people sharing in the same flesh which Christ assumed in the womb of the Virgin, people for whom Jesus died were killed. And they died in a place that wouldn't hear the Gospel. And as with any tragedy, no matter who the victims are, this is a warning to us. Death comes by night and comes by day and takes its prey most surely. We do not choose when and where we die. And so we need to constantly hear the Word of God, hear the Gospel, confess our sins to God and hear and believe the sweet forgiveness that comes from Jesus alone.

Jesus says this very thing in Luke chapter thirteen, "There were some present at that very time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And Jesus

answered them, 'Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them: do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.'"

Death should always remind us of our own mortality. That we will die and we don't choose when and how. We need to repent of our sins and trust in God's mercy now, before we die.

The survivors of this tragedy need prayers. They need comfort, but not as the world gives, but as Jesus gives. They need to hear that God loves them. That he sent his Son Jesus to die for them. That Jesus bore the punishment for their sins, just as he did for us. They need to hear what you need to hear. That God is merciful to you. That whatever sins oppress your conscience, Jesus died for them. That God does not judge you or condemn you for them, but forgives you.

"Be merciful even as your Father is merciful." You won't understand what it means to be merciful unless you know what God's mercy looks like. Today is Father's Day. And what is especially wonderful, we have two baptisms: a father and his son. While Braxton is the son of Chris, they both have the same heavenly Father. God has made them his children through the washing of water and the word in Baptism. St. Paul writes to the Galatians, "For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ." (Gal. 3:26-27) In other words, God had mercy on Braxton and Chris. He had mercy on them by calling those who were not his children according to the flesh, his children by putting his name on them. This is what is prophesied in Hosea chapter 2, "And I will have mercy on No Mercy, and I will say to Not My People, 'You are my people'; and he shall say, 'You are my God.'" (Hosea 2:23)

Chris is Braxton's biological father. Yet now that Braxton has been joined to Christ in the waters of Baptism, God has placed into Chris and Courtney's care a son of God. Chris is a spiritual father to Braxton. That means that he has the task of showing God's mercy to his son. Mercy does not mean that Chris lets Braxton do whatever he wants without discipline. Quite the opposite. A merciful father disciplines

his children to spare them more suffering later. A father shows mercy to his son not only by disciplining him, but by forgiving him. Even more, by telling him of the forgiveness in Christ. That God loves him so much that he sent his Son to die for him. That he is God's own child by the mercy of his baptism. A Christian father shows mercy to his children by bringing them to church to experience God's mercy, every week. In the Divine Service a child learns how truly merciful God is when he hears that his sins are forgiven, that God actually comes to join himself with sinners, and even feeds them with heavenly food.

And a spiritual father learns to show this mercy to his spiritual children by first receiving this mercy himself. God's mercy is for you fathers. He forgives you for every time you've failed to be a spiritual father to the children God has placed in your care. He forgives you for when you've failed to be a good husband and son. He forgives you by putting your sins on Christ and offering you mercy through Word and Sacrament. And it is through this mercy shown to you that you learn to show mercy to your children. This is the mercy you need. This is the mercy your children need. This is the mercy all people need. It is a mercy paid for by the blood of Christ and given freely here every week. Our Father is merciful. His mercy endures forever. Amen.