

The Seventh Sunday after the Epiphany
St. Luke 6:27-38

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who abuse you. Turn the other cheek to those who strike you. Give your tunic to the one who took your cloak; maybe we can say give your shirt to the one who took your coat. Give to beggars. Don't demand your stuff back from the one who took it. Do to others what you would have them do to you. Lend without expecting payback.

But wait, there's more!

Do not judge or condemn and you won't be judged or condemned. Forgive and you will be forgiven. Give and it will be given to you. "Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap."

It's all a tall order. I mean, I know that as I read through the list earlier, and now recounting it, you got a little uncomfortable in your seats at one point or more, and for good reason. There's something in those lists which doesn't sit well with you because you don't do it, hate to do it, and have likely done the opposite.

Let's take everyone's favorite, especially among the unbelievers. "Judge not, and you will not be judged." That one is usually pulled out by your adversaries because they feel judged by you. Maybe you said something that pointed out the sinfulness of what they do. Or maybe you simply professed yourself a Christian in their presence and they felt convicted because they know what they're doing is sinful. Either way, they feel judged by you and let you know that you shouldn't judge them or you'll be judged.

For one thing, that's not what the text is getting at. Yes, I did say last week that Jesus was preaching the same material here on the plain as He had on the mount in Matthew 5 and following, putting a plainly different spin on it while on the plain. On the plain, He plainly said, "Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned." The two go together. They are connected ideas. On the mount, Jesus said,

Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? (Matthew 7:1-3)

More detail from the mount... Basically, Jesus is not giving a complete prohibition on judging, at least as He put it from the mount. In this regard, He didn't just give a different spin from the plain, He's said something a little different.

From the mount, Jesus preached that you ought to be careful in your judgments. Judgment is a gift from God. It allows you to tell right from wrong, make decisions on which way to go, what to eat, when to go to bed, and what to do. Judgments should always be informed, especially in judging between right and wrong. And when you judge between right and wrong in someone else, warning them that their sin will lead to condemnation, you must always confess that it is the same for you apart from Christ, but that in Christ there is the forgiveness of sins. That's what it means to see the speck in your neighbor's eye as well as the log in your own. In fact, this kind of judgment is commanded of you in Scripture. (cf. John 7:24; 1 Corinthians 6:5; Ephesians 5:11; 1 John 2:18-20; et al)

From the plain, however, Jesus equated judgment and condemnation. You have no place to condemn anyone. Only God forgives, and only God condemns. Where those two diverge is that God has given you the command to forgive, but not to condemn. He does come close, because in righteous judgment, He does give the church authority to withhold forgiveness, to put it bluntly, by binding the sins to the unrepentant. Still, even in such a dire case, condemnation is reserved solely for God. You and I have no authority from God to send a person to hell. Judge the sin, proclaim the wrath of God

against sinfulness, and declare the faithfulness of God in providing salvation against His wrath in the blood of Jesus Christ crucified, died, and risen. And thank God that He has given you and the other person time to repent and receive His forgiveness.

Right judgment is a tall order, as is not condemning. Everyone is guilty from time to time of improperly judging and condemning when one ought not. The same can be said for the rest of what Jesus said from the plain that day.

So, just how are you to take all of that? Are these things you ought not to be doing or doing as He said in order to be right with Him? Absolutely not! "Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin." (Romans 3:19-20) The law is a righteous judge. It declares to you the way of righteousness. It also proclaims to you the impossibility of keeping every jot and tittle. (cf. Matthew 5:18) Therefore, no one will be justified by keeping the law, because no one can keep the law. The same can be said of the commands Jesus gave from the plain (and from the mount). On the contrary, the law (and these commands included) serve as a righteous judge, showing you just how much you don't measure up to God's righteousness.

This is the second function of the law, the chief function. This function tells you that you hate your enemies instead of loving them. That you do evil to those who hate you instead of good. That you curse those who curse and abuse you. That you strike back at those who strike you. That you withhold your shirt from the one who takes your coat, and in fact, that you fight to get your coat back. That you do not give to beggars. And perhaps most damning of all (if one were to judge things in a way), you do not forgive as you have been forgiven. No wonder Jesus bade His church to pray, "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." (cf. Matthew 6:12)

Still, you have been forgiven, and you most certainly are forgiven. Therefore, that third function of the law is also at play here. Not only do you hear Jesus' commands as a righteous judge pointing out your sin—pointing out the log in your eye—but also as a gentle instructor. The New Man delights in the Law of God, as the Psalmist and St. Paul declare. (cf. Psalm 1:2; Romans 7:22) He joyfully receives God's law as an instruction and meditates on it day and night. As I like to say, the New Man asks, "God, how can I please you?" And God's answer is His law. And by the working of the Holy Spirit in you, you do good works according to the law, and please your Father in heaven, not to righteousness, but as a son pleases his father by his obedience. The son is always a son, good or bad, but in the good, the son pleases his father.

Remember from last week, after power gushed out of Jesus, healing people and exorcising demons, He turned directly to His disciples and preached to them. Today's text is a continuation of that sermon. This is what His disciples out to be about: loving their enemies, doing good to those who hate them, and forgiving those who have sinned. It doesn't sound like too tall an order when it's put that way, and especially when it's framed by the third function of the law: as instruction for the New Man that you have received in the waters of Holy Baptism, which have made you a dearly beloved son of God. True, you won't get it right this side of eternity, because you are at the same time justified and sinner in this Vale of Tears. But God has given you the desire to do these things, as St. Paul also declared (cf. Romans 7:15-23), and the grace to be reconciled to Him when you come up short, again and again.

As His son, God loves you. Because in Christ, He has made you a friend who was once His enemy. (cf. Romans 5:10) In Christ, He has shown you the greatest good, who once hated Him (for what enemy of God loves Him?). This is how it's given to you..."Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap:" in Christ, you are a New Creation, a New Man who delights in the Law of God—by grace through faith—for by the measure you use it is measured back to you, and you are found faithful in Christ, and forgiven you for all of your sins.

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.