

*Trinity IV Sermon by Bishop Michael Hawkins*

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Be ye therefore merciful as your Father also is merciful.

*(Two props required, magnifying glass and mirror)*

*(Hold up magnifying glass.)* This is a magnifying glass. With its help, you can see what is before you in much more detail.

Sometimes you can pick out flaws or cracks or tears, in things that the naked eye would otherwise miss. *(Hold up mirror.)* This is a mirror. With it, you can see yourself as you really are. It helps you to assess how you look.

Jesus is telling us to put down the magnifying glass, with which we so carefully and critically inspect each other's lives, and to pick up a mirror and have a good and honest look at ourselves.

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Beams are not often spoken of these days, and motes even less. The comparison is between a speck and a two-by-four, a toothpick and a telephone pole, a sliver and a log. When we get upset, as we do, about the sins of others, or when we get obsessed and distracted by the downfall of society or the corruption of the Church, we are in a dither and a lather about toothpicks and slivers. And all the while, we are unaware of the log and telephone pole in our own eye. The comparison Jesus makes is exaggerated, just like the ten thousand talents and hundred pence, or two million dollars and twenty dollars, in the parable of the unforgiving servant. Jesus exaggerates because we so grossly underestimate our own sins, especially in comparison to others. Our Lord's point is that we, who are so critical of others, reveal how little we know of our own faults. We, who are so unforgiving, reveal how little we know our own need for forgiveness.

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Judge not. The word used in the Greek is the root of our word

“critical” and it is that critical spirit that Jesus calls us to give up.

There is a fault-finding and offense-taking attitude in us. I recognize

and confess it in myself, and Jesus would have us give that up

completely, forever. Next, he tells us to turn from condemning.

Judge not. Condemn not. This is what we must turn from, what we

must give up, if we are to follow Jesus and to become more like him.

And this is what we must take up and turn to, if we are to follow Jesus and to become more and more like him. Forgive.

Give.

Do you see that there our Lord gives us two negative

commands, two prohibitions: “Judge not” and “Condemn not,” and

two positive commands, two prescriptions: “Forgive” and “Give”?

These are not accidental pairs. Rather, judgment and condemnation

are the opposite of forgiveness and giving.

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The opposite of judging is forgiving, and the opposite of condemning is giving, and our lives are filled with these choices, small and large. Our natural reaction is usually to judge and condemn, but that commits us to a hellish life and a life in hell. That commits us to a world without mercy. Mercy forgives and gives. What we are talking about here is either a cheapness and meanness of heart, which judges, or a largeness and greatness of heart, which forgives. There is a smallness of living which condemns, and a greatness which gives. Whenever someone sins, and most especially when the trespass is against us, we either judge or forgive. Whenever we face the needy, and that means almost everyone in trouble, the choice we face is either to condemn or to give, to rub it in or to rub it out. We either remind people of how it is all their own fault, or we seek to help and save the lost.

What our Lord calls for, though, sounds almost impossible, and anyone who has seriously attempted such a kind of life knows well

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the difficulty. He says, “Love ye your enemies, and do good, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil.” But we find it hard to love our family and friends, let alone our enemies!

Now, this kind of forgiving and giving can only be ours, if we have first received it from God. This kind of generosity of heart and life of loving and living, will only be ours if we have first known and received it from God. Jesus calls us to forgive and give, as those who have first been forgiven and received. Jesus calls us to love as we have been loved.

It is the generosity of God which we are called to reflect and imitate. What Jesus gives us, is then much like a pharmacist’s prescription. Having been saved, this is how we daily remain in that state of salvation.

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But there is a warning in our Lord's words. Unless we seek in some way to reflect and to share this generosity of God, we shall never keep it. Judge not, and ye shall not be judged. Condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned. Forgive and ye shall be forgiven. Give and it shall be given unto you. The measure you give will be the measure you get. Now by that standard, we should shudder when we recall our grudges and cheapness, our bickering and fault-finding, our neglect of the poor and needy. Saint James warns us, in James 2.13, "he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath showed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment." As Shakespeare put it, mercy seasons justice. Our Lord both promises and warns, that the merciful shall obtain mercy. We pray for mercy, every Sunday and every day, and we are called to share and show that mercy every day.

Our Gospel reading ends with Jesus pointing us to ourselves, to look there, for and at our own faults, our pride. Surely the beam in

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all of our eyes is self-righteousness. We come to be forgiven and to receive, but we must go from here, and we are bound to go from here, to forgive and to give.

Generous, gracious and grateful lives are rooted in the goodness and mercy of God. It is as we apprehend, appreciate, receive, taste and see that infinite generosity of God, that we are transformed into generous people. Be ye therefore merciful as your Father also is merciful. Freely ye have received, freely give. Amen.