

4th Sunday after Trinity

Psalm: 91

First Lesson: Lamentations 3:22-33

²² It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not.

²³ They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness.

²⁴ The Lord is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him.

²⁵ The Lord is good unto them that wait for him, to the soul that seeketh him.

²⁶ It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord.

²⁷ It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth.

²⁸ He sitteth alone and keepeth silence, because he hath borne it upon him.

²⁹ He putteth his mouth in the dust; if so be there may be hope.

³⁰ He giveth his cheek to him that smiteth him: he is filled full with reproach.

³¹ For the Lord will not cast off for ever:

³² But though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies.

³³ For he doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men.

Second Lesson: Luke 6:36-42

³⁶ Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful.

³⁷ Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven:

³⁸ Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again.

³⁹ And he spake a parable unto them, Can the blind lead the blind? shall they not both fall into the ditch?

⁴⁰ The disciple is not above his master: but every one that is perfect shall be as his master.

⁴¹ And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but perceivest not the beam that is in thine own eye?

⁴² Either how canst thou say to thy brother, Brother, let me pull out the mote that is in thine eye, when thou thyself beholdest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, cast out first the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to pull out the mote that is in thy brother's eye.

Introduction

As I began to read our second lesson for today, my mind swam back in time to when I was in the fourth grade. My best friend Kurtis had come over to tell me that a lady who lived down the street, Mrs. Holtzen, was going to start up a Cub Scout troop and he wanted me to join with him. It sounded like a great idea, and I was all in on it. I talked to my parents, and they signed me up. Before the first meeting, we went to Sears where all the Scout regalia was to be found. I grabbed a Scout manual, the shirt and kerchief, and several other pieces of the uniform. I was excited to be part of what looked to be a fun adventure.

When Saturday evening came, Kurtis and I dressed in our uniforms and walked down the street for our first meeting. Mrs. Holzen answered the door and ushered us inside. We walked in and gazed admiringly at a plate of cupcakes and several two-liter bottles of soda before being seated at a large dining table with several other kids. Mrs. Holtzen was no nonsense, I could tell that from the minute we walked in. After all the kids had arrived, she proceeded to break out the Scout manual and asked us to read along while she read the Scout oath. She told us that once we understood it, and agreed to adhere to it, we would all take this oath and become full-fledged Cub Scouts.

For those who are unfamiliar, or as a reminder, it goes like this:

On my honor, I will do my best

To do my duty to God and my country and to obey the Scout Law;

To help other people at all times;

To keep myself physically strong, mentally awake and morally straight.

After we read it, she looked around and started asking us questions. What does honor mean? What does it mean to do my duty to God, and my country? She discussed what being physically strong entailed and how we might go about doing it. She asked us what we thought being mentally awake meant in our lives. When we got to the part about being “morally straight” she pulled a copy of the Bible off a bookshelf and turned to the Ten Commandments. She proceeded to go through them all, one at a time, and explain what they meant and how we, as humans, do not honor God when we disobey them. It is our duty as Christians she continued, to be constantly aware of our actions, our behavior and words, and if we did that, if we followed the Ten Commandments, we would be morally straight. She finished with, “being a scout, and being a good Christian, is not easy, but if you work hard at it, you will succeed.”

Mrs. Holtzen’s speech had a significant impact on me. In addition to learning the brand new to me concepts of adultery and what it means to covet, I was inspired by her unwavering faith and insistence that we take this seriously. I wanted to live my life this way. The next Sunday as I sat in the pew at St. Andrew’s Episcopal church, I paid a little extra attention to the sermon and the liturgy. It became something I took seriously and formed a lasting impression on me that my conduct, and following the commandments of God, is important.

As I read our passage from Luke, where Jesus is giving instruction to the people on how to live their lives, it dawned on me how important these words are to all of us in our everyday lives. These words Jesus gives are powerful and give us instruction on the importance of mercy, not judging others, and looking inward. The teachings and parables of Jesus, found in Holy Scripture, are instrumental in helping us to grow as Christians. However, having a Bible sitting on a bookshelf and never reading it does not do you any good. As we pray in my favorite Collect from the Second Sunday in Advent, "Blessed Lord, who hast caused all Holy Scripture to be written for our learning: Grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn and inwardly digest them." A suitable place to start is in our passage from Luke, often referred to as the "Sermon on the Plain," where Jesus gives us an important collection of His ethical and spiritual teachings.

Body

(Luke 6:36-42 Jesus, coming down from the mountain, addresses the concepts of mercy, how weighing judgement on others will result in similar judgement from God, accountability for our own actions, and the importance of self-reflection.)

Jesus, having called His disciples and ministered to the crowds, now delivers some of His most challenging and counter-cultural teachings. This is not just light advice or thoughts to ponder; it is a call to a radically unusual way of living. Jesus begins by encouraging the people to show mercy to others, just as God is merciful to us. *"Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful."* (v. 36) This is an especially important concept for all of us to understand. We all need God's mercy and without it we are hopeless. God's mercy is the model and the source for how we should interact with others. It is the very character of God we are called to imitate. In many of the Collects that we pray, and in our prayers during Holy Communion, we constantly seek God's "mercy and forgiveness" and acknowledge our own need for it. Our liturgy forms us in this

understanding of the merciful God, who despite our grievous sins, will forgive the penitent heart of those who unfeignedly believe in His Holy Gospel. Jesus reminds us that we also must give this mercy to others, something that for flawed human beings is often difficult to do.

In verses 37, Jesus tells the people, *“Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven”*. This is the concept of reciprocity: the measure we use will be measured back to us. It is in essence the golden rule of “do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” This is a divine principle of sowing and reaping, not just a human tit-for-tat. The Bible teaches us that this principle applies to everyone. It is a fundamental law woven into the fabric of creation. In his Epistle to the Galatians, Paul tells them *“Do not be deceived, God is not mocked, for whatever a man sows, he will also reap”* (Gal. 6:7). Good seeds yield good fruit. If you sow kindness, generosity, integrity, mercy and love, you can expect to reap positive outcomes in these areas. However, if you sow selfishness, deceit, hatred or discord, you will ultimately reap negative consequences and corruption. We all fall into this trap from time to time, through our own pride, our arrogance or need to feel we are superior to others. The General Confession acknowledges our "manifold sins and wickedness" which all must constantly guard against. When we act in this manner, we must come to God for forgiveness, in a posture of humility and the presence of a contrite and repentant heart.

In verse 39-41 Jesus asks, *“Can the blind lead the blind? Shall they not both fall into the ditch? The disciple is not above his master: but every one that is perfect shall be as his master.”* And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but perceivest not the beam that is in thine own eye?” Jesus uses the analogy of a speck in someone else's eye and a log in one's own eye to illustrate that one should address their own flaws before attempting to correct others. Ultimately, the passage calls for self-reflection, humility, and a focus on personal growth

before attempting to judge or correct others. I always found this passage to be a little disturbing, but it does provide profound imagery. The concept of pointing out the problems with another, without acknowledging the same, or deeper, issues within us, illustrates the danger of spiritual arrogance and hypocrisy. Jesus gives a strong rebuke of such behavior by saying, *“Either how canst thou say to thy brother, Brother, let me pull out the mote that is in thine eye, when thou thyself beholdest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, cast out first the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to pull out the mote that is in thy brother's eye”* (v.42). We must look within, recognize our own sin and negative behavior, before pointing out the same in another person, speaking the truth in love and respect.

Action

While all of this sounds straight forward and is not hard to comprehend, living this life can often be particularly challenging and difficult. Coming to church is not a spiritual mulligan, but an opportunity to let the liturgy and intercessory prayer move us to examine and redefine how we choose to live our lives. It is a process; one we need to be involved in and cognizant of. Examine what seeds you sow on a regular basis. Do you practice intentionally offering mercy and forgiveness to others in daily interactions? Are you quick to point out the flaws or sinful behavior of others while ignoring your own sinful actions and judgmental inclinations? I encourage you, by the grace of God, to move beyond just hearing the words Christ preached and instill active obedience in your daily life. I encourage you to build a resilient life that is inspired and rooted in Christ's teachings and commandments, followed by actively working toward it.

Conclusion

In our passage from Luke, Jesus calls us to a demanding yet liberating discipleship, revealing that genuine faith is demonstrated not by outward profession alone, but by a merciful

heart, a discerning spirit, and a life built on the unshakeable foundation of His Word. Authentic discipleship, from an Anglican perspective, is a holistic journey involving a heart transformed by God's unconditional love and endless mercy, actions that bear good fruit, and a life deliberately built on the obedience to our Lord's commands. Mrs. Holtzen wanted us, as new Cub Scouts, to see the interconnectedness of mercy, humility, and obedience to God's commandments as the hallmarks of a sturdy moral life. Along with helping others, staying mentally awake and attentive to our own behavior, we can have influence in the lives of others, and honor God in all we do. Despite our imperfections, Christ himself is the Rock we can build our faith on, and through His grace, we are empowered to live lives that reflect His mercy and bring us to His eternal joy.

To the only wise God, Be glory, majesty, dominion and power, Now and Forever, Amen.