

IV TRINITY 2014
SERMON - CHRIST CHURCH PARISH
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ROMANS 8.18 ST. LUKE 6.36

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Be perfect...Jesus tells us...just like God our Father in heaven is perfect. And show mercy toward others...just like God our Father shows mercy toward us.

We are most likely to fall short of showing God's kind of mercy when we are overly critical and judgmental of another person's bad behavior...especially when we see the same bad behavior in ourselves...and refuse to do anything about it.

That would be like a blind person...Jesus says...leading another blind person over rocky ground...both end up falling down. It would be like a high school freshman wanting to teach an advanced chemistry class...when he has never studied chemistry. It would be like trying to remove the speck of dust from someone's eye...when we have an entire forest of trees in our own eyes clouding our vision.

If I want to teach my friend how to drive my brand new car...I first have to learn how to drive the car myself...and learn the rules of the road. A stop sign means "Stop"...not speed through the intersection at 80 MPH. If I have never learned how to drive and still hand the keys to my friend and tell him to drive...what is likely to happen? He might crash my brand new car...or worse! How could I then criticize my friend's bad driving when I don't know how to drive myself?

Jesus never tells us to ignore bad behavior. We miss the point if we come to the conclusion we should never judge others. We are supposed to judge bad behavior in another person and then reach out to them with love and compassion to try to help them change their bad behavior. But before we presume to lend a helping hand...we first need to do something about ourselves.

When we look at ourselves in the mirror...what do we see? We see a reflection of ourselves...but it's not a true reflection. We are only able to see what we look like on the outside. We don't really see what is in our hearts. God our Father is concerned about the disposition of our hearts. Our hearts must be disposed toward love of God and compassion toward others.

We have a responsibility to try to get others to correct their bad behavior as long as we do so in the same way God does...with humility, love, compassion, and mercy. God sees us the way we really are. We need to try to see ourselves...including our faults...the way we really are. That means admitting we have faults and asking God to forgive us. Only then are we in a position to help others.

If we are looking for the measure...the standard...that governs our behavior...we can find it printed in several places in the Prayer Book...the Ten Commandments is a good place to start. That standard is summarized at the beginning of every Mass to remind us what our hearts must be focused on...loving God above all else; loving others just as we want to be loved.

Christian love means acting for the good of others. We are supposed to help others overcome the obstacles in their lives...the unhealthy and destructive behavior that keeps them from experiencing God's love to the fullest. We can't help others unless we first take a look at our own lives. If we are engaged in unhealthy and destructive behavior ourselves...we must first stop that behavior.

Saint Paul tells us that we can expect obstacles to get in our way during this lifetime...what he calls the things that we suffer at this present time. Those obstacles can be physical...things that make us literally fall down...or they can be spiritual...things that cause us to lose our sight of God.

Our job now during this lifetime is to make certain those obstacles don't wreck us...and we need to make certain we are not obstacles wrecking other people's lives. Paul had a lot of obstacles get in his way but he never gave up and he never lost hope. Neither should we. God will give us the help we need.

We must continue to reach out to those who need our help...not because we think we are better than they are...but because God loves us and has forgiven us and we want others to know his love and forgiveness.

God shows us mercy and compassion...we must show the same kind of mercy and compassion toward others.

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