

Fourth Sunday after Trinity

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 13 July 2025

Preacher: Seminarian Matthew Stuart

[0 : 0 0] In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Amen. Please be seated. In today's Gospel reading, we find one of our Lord's most challenging and transformative teachings about mercy and spiritual sight.

Christ calls us to a radical form of self-examination and divine mercy because only when we see clearly, first removing the plank from our own eye, can we truly serve others and reflect God's grace?

Our Lord begins with a call to mercy, then immediately warns us about the blindness that prevents such mercy from taking root in our own hearts.

This progression is no accident. Again, Jesus understands that without clear spiritual vision, our attempts at mercy will fail.

As Luke 6.36 tells us, be merciful just as your Father also is merciful. This is not a suggestion.

[1 : 1 6] This is a command. Here, Jesus takes the great commandment, you shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy, and interprets it through the lens of divine mercy.

This standard applies to every Christian. There are no exceptions. That is because we are made in God's image, and that image demands mercy.

Therefore, mercy isn't mere sentiment. It's participation in the very nature of God himself. Scripture tells us that Almighty God is kind and merciful, causing the sun to shine on the ungrateful and on the just, and sending rain to both the holy and the evil.

If God shows mercy to his enemies, what excuse do we have for withholding it from ours? If we claim to follow Christ, we must mirror the character of our Heavenly Father.

The fourfold imperatives that our Lord gives us in our Gospel text this morning are, judge not, condemn not, forgive, and give.

[2 : 4 4] These aren't just suggestions for better living. They are the very conditions of receiving God's mercy ourselves. However, the important part is this.

Grace and mercy always precede action. We cannot give what we have not first received. This is why Jesus structures his teaching as he does.

Mercy first, then instruction about our blindness. Our Lord asks one of his most pointed questions. Can the blind lead the blind?

Will they not both fall into the ditch? This isn't only about incompetent teachers. This is about the spiritual blindness that afflicts us all.

The blindness that makes us think we can guide others when we ourselves are stumbling in darkness. Jesus teaches us that a disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is perfectly trained will be like his teacher.

[3 : 5 7] In other words, we inevitably become like our teachers as their character influences ours. Therefore, we must remain vigilant in avoiding teachers who lead us into the ditch of judgment and condemnation.

Instead, let us follow the one who embodies perfect mercy. In our chaotic age of social media influencers and self-help gurus, our Lord's warning cannot be more urgent.

If you follow someone who takes in no spiritual light, you will stumble. The religious leaders of Jesus' day believed themselves to be guides for the blind.

Yet, they were, in fact, blind themselves. How easily we fall into the same trap. Majoring in the minors while missing what matters most.

We become experts at external rules while our hearts remain unchanged. Our Lord goes on to expose our hypocrisy with the parable about removing the plank that's in our own eye before removing the speck in others.

[5 : 18] Jesus is not being gentle here. He is trying to show how hypocritical we are by making us picture someone performing delicate surgery on an eyelash while a wooden beam sticks out of their own eye.

That's us when we criticize others while ignoring our own massive failings. This is the root of our spiritual sickness.

Pride that makes us expert critics of others while remaining unconscious of our own far greater failings. How much time do we spend examining the faults of our spouse, our neighbors, our fellow Christians?

How much time do we actually spend looking at ourselves? As Psalm 133 asks, If you, Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?

But we prefer the easier path of judging others. We love to discuss the failures of politicians, the hypocrisy of other Christians, and the problems in other churches.

[6 : 32] Anything to avoid the painful effort of looking at our own hearts. We must distinguish between being discerning about sin and being judgmental.

Being discerning means we recognize sin for what it is, and we repent of that. Being judgmental means we gloat over the sin of others, taking pleasure in pointing it out, rather than repenting and rejoicing in the repentance of others.

Here's the truth we must face. We ourselves are the most sinful people we know. Until we grasp this reality, we cannot approach others about their sins without becoming blind guides ourselves.

This isn't false humility. It's spiritual honesty. When we truly know our own hearts, we become gentler with others, because we understand how desperately we all need God's grace.

Now make no mistake, mercy doesn't ignore sin, or, as we see nowadays more and more, affirm sin. But we confess our sins, ready to receive sinners like ourselves, back into the grace of God's mercy.

[8 : 04] As our Lord says, first remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck that is in your brother's eye. Jesus doesn't say never help your brother.

He says, first, deal with your own sin. That way the goal is clear sight, not spiritual paralysis.

But this requires the hard work of sincere spiritual formation to build a firm foundation. Going back to the four imperatives that our Lord gives, judge not until we have judged ourselves, condemn not, forgive, and give.

These are all commands that are wrapped in mercy. As we hear in our liturgy, our Lord's property is to always have mercy. Let us continually receive God's mercy and be instruments of God's mercy to the world.

The path to true spiritual sight begins with brutal honesty about our own condition and our desperate dependence on God's mercy.

[9 : 20] From this foundation of humility, we can genuinely help others, not as the righteous helping the unrighteous, but as beggars showing other beggars where to find bread.

This is the only way to escape spiritual blindness and avoid being the blind, leading the blind.

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

Amen.