

**Our Challenge as Disciples
Luke 6:36-49**

We are living through something we have never had to deal with before. We are having to rethink life as we know it. As I have been checking on you this past week I am grateful that most of you are heeding the warnings and staying home as much as possible. I know it's hard but it is what we have to do right now. And my first concern as your pastor is your health and safety.

As I thought about what I would say today I looked at several passages of scripture but I was drawn back to our passage today from Luke 6 which was what I had planned to preach in our Lenten series. For these are the words from Jesus to the disciples as they began their ministry together. They are basic instructions that provide a challenge for us as disciples of Christ in a world turned upside down by the COVID 19 pandemic.

Our passage begins with four powerful phrases that are then fleshed out in the rest of the passage. The first phrase guides the reading of the passage. *Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.* Mercy and grace are critical especially in this environment for we are all learning as we go. Note we are to be merciful because that is the model that God the Father provides for us. The words of the great hymn writer Frederick William Faber remind us of how wide God's mercy is:

There's a wideness in God's mercy,
like the wideness of the sea.
There's a kindness in God's justice,
which is more than liberty.
There is no place where earth's sorrows
are more felt than up in heaven.
There is no place where earth's failings
have such kindly judgment given.

For the love of God is broader
than the measures of the mind.
And the heart of the Eternal
is most wonderfully kind.
If our love were but more faithful,
we would gladly trust God's Word,
and our lives reflect thanksgiving
for the goodness of our Lord.

Friends, we are called as Christ's disciples to show mercy as God shows mercy to us. And in the stresses of life right now this is really important. We need to remember that all those on the front lines of fighting this disease are working as hard as they can to get us the information needed. It is so easy to get frustrated when we see those who are not heeding the warnings. Or when we need a test and can't get it. When our own surgeries or procedures are postponed and we become anxious. Or when the people we are isolated with get on our nerves. Or just being confined to our homes is a struggle for many of us. But as Christ's disciples we are called to show mercy and grace to those we intersect with - to share concern and to love our neighbors as ourselves.

The second and third phrases offer the negative and the positive of how we do this.

Do not judge, and you will not be judged is the negative.

Forgive, and you will be forgiven is the positive.

And the overriding command is the third:

Give, and it will be given to you.

But what we need to add to those sentences which are implied from the first phrase are the two words - by God.

Do not judge, and you will not be judged by God.

Forgive, and you will be forgiven by God

Give, and it will be given to you by God.

Friends, the challenge as Christ's disciples is to show others the same generosity that God provides to us.

The image Jesus provided was of a worker in the field who used his tunic above his belt as a pocket to gather more than he could hold. *Pressed down, shaken together, running over* because more was provided than could be held. I remember as a child using my t-shirt to gather acorns and berries. That is the image but the measure of generosity God provides to us is overflowing. And the measure we give to others is the measure we will get back in return.

Jesus went on. The blind leading the blind is a reminder that we need to open our eyes to God's way of life and let it provide the vision for our lives. The analogy of the speck in our neighbor's eye versus the log in our eye reminds us that to be a disciple means that we must first examine our own hearts and actions before we judge others. The image of the tree and its fruit reminds us that who we are at our core is seen in how we live our lives. So once again we need to work on our thoughts and our beliefs so that they are consistent with God's way of seeing the world.

Friends, we are living in a time where generosity is crucial. We are called to be generous with those around us caring and loving one another and in this environment that means practicing physical distancing. We are called to be generous with those we don't even know by not hoarding things, expressing care and concern for those on the front lines and offering prayers for our entire world. Not judging the actions of others but helping where we can by checking on one another, continuing to give to others and taking care of those in our communities as best we can from a distance.

The final image that Jesus provides of a man building a home on solid rock reminds us of the importance of faithful action by building a strong foundation that will support us in the midst of the storm. Jesus said *"I will show you what someone is like who comes to me, hears my words, and acts*

on them.” And friends, this is a time when we are called to lean on our solid foundation of faith, to work to strengthen it and to act as Christ’s disciples. We are called to faithful living in the midst of a pandemic. And faithful living requires us to hold fast to God’s words and to act in accordance with Christ’s commandments as we live into this new reality. It is why we are seeking new ways to bring the word of God to you even when we are being told to stay home. We are so very fortunate that we live in a world where technology provides us a way to connect with one another without physical presence. And fortunate to have those in our midst who know how to help us provide it to you! I know it is new to many of us and somewhat of a challenge but what a gift it is! It is a way to keep us grounded in God’s word even as we stay home. Let me encourage you to use this time at home to read scripture and to pray, to write notes to one another, to call one another or email or text. I’ve been Face Timing with my children and grandchildren and it helps to see their precious faces.

Friends, we as a church, are reaching out to our partners in the community and offering help where we can. Just yesterday we had the food you had placed in our MUST barrels delivered to MUST by one of our members. Members of this church were involved in helping the Family Promise families get relocated into the transitional homes for the foreseeable future. We have reached out to Bells Ferry Elementary and they know we are here to help. Your faithful giving will enable us to continue to care for others in the days and months to come.

Ultimately what Jesus was challenging the disciples to do and is challenging us to do is to ground ourselves so deeply in God and Christ’s teachings that our learnings become embodied in action. We are called to imitate Jesus by sharing God’s mercy, generosity and faithful action.

I want to close with a story that comes from a Presbyterian mission coworker in Africa. This mission coworker was serving in a sub-Saharan country that was in conflict with one of its neighbors. The fight, as it usually is, was over land, resources, and tribal rivalries that pitted one country against

the other. This mission worker remembered one particularly violent clash where soldiers and rebels were massacring each other in growing numbers. But in the midst of it all, there was a tableau of peace and understanding, of human contact and human love.

At the border of these two countries a small number of mothers from each rival nation were standing, facing each other through a crude fence. As gunfire erupted all around them, these mothers were quietly passing their babies through the fence, and they were nursing each other's children. Somehow, these women were able to take the logs out of their own eyes and see the specks of light in their enemy's eyes. And with the very milk of kindness they were nourishing hope for their children's future. (<https://sermons.com/sermon/it-s-not-about-me/1483654>)

May we too offer God's mercy to all, learn to share with God's abundant generosity and ground ourselves so deeply in God's Word that our lives embody God's faithful love through action. For a life of mercy, generosity and faithfulness will sustain us in the days to come.