

Children tend to imitate their parents, the way they talk, the way they act, and the way they do things in general. We all know this from experience. That's how kids learn to talk. It's how they learn to walk. It's how they learn to act in the world. So it shouldn't come as any surprise then, Christians, that being a Christian is much the same thing, because in reality we are children of our heavenly Father. And to imitate our heavenly Father as his children means that we will seek to do what he does, to think the way that he thinks, and to act the way that he acts. That's what Jesus is talking about today in our gospel reading from the Gospel of Luke, about what it means to imitate God, what it means to be like him as children of the heavenly Father. And Jesus gives us many concrete examples of what that looks like, so that we understand how this happens.

So let's look at our first one then, beginning in verse 36. Jesus says, "Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful." So what do we mean by mercy? Mercy is showing that kind of favor, especially an undeserved favor, to someone that frankly doesn't deserve it. Someone who is condemned but is not punished is shown mercy. Someone who is struggling and failing and yet we bear with them in patience is being shown mercy. But how difficult that is for us, Christians! Because how often do we become impatient? How often do we become merciless, especially with someone who we think doesn't deserve our mercy? Very often it happens because we think we deserve something. We think that we have been wronged in some way and we deserve justice for whatever reason that might be. And because we think we deserve justice, we're not willing to bear with the failings of someone else, especially the small failings of someone else. And so it's very easy, unfortunately, to become merciless.

But Christians, we have been shown mercy. Because do you think that we deserve God's favor? Do you think we deserved to be forgiven of our many sins? Absolutely not. While we were yet his enemies, while we were still unbelievers, God showed us an undeserved mercy in his Son Jesus Christ, not giving us the things that we deserve according to God's righteous judgment, but giving us his love, that love which is ours through Jesus and the mercy of God, as undeserved as that is. So if we have been shown mercy, Christians, should we not also show mercy to one another? To bear with the failings of the weak, to put up with all of these little things that annoy us, to forgive as we have been forgiven? To be like God in this situation means to think like him and to act like him and to show that mercy to a people who need it again and again and again.

So that's one way. Jesus also says in verse 37, "Judge not, and you will not be judged. Condemn not, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven." The world loves this verse, don't they? Judge not, and you will not be judged! You can't tell me what to do. You can't say anything against me, because you're not supposed to judge. That's what the Bible says, right? You can't condemn me for anything. That's not what Jesus means here. When he talks about this kind of judgment that we're not supposed to be doing, he's not talking about judging false doctrine, for example. And he's also not talking about judging sin for what it is. The Bible commands us to do both of those things. What Jesus is talking about here is the kind of judgment that is made with a loveless heart, the kind of judgment that looks at someone else and sees the kinds of things that they have done and immediately condemns them for it, either before we even

know what's going on, or because we frankly just don't care. They did something, and we're going to condemn them, because we think that we are in a better position than they are. But that kind of lovelessness, that kind of judgment, that lack of forgiveness, ultimately tears down, doesn't it tears, doesn't it? It tears down and it casts someone else to the ground, while at the same time trying to lift ourselves up. And that is exactly the kind of judgment that Jesus is condemning here. Because when we judge in a spirit of love--judgment against false doctrine, judgment against sin, whatever it might be--when we judge in a spirit of love, we are seeking to lift up. We are seeking to build up, to bring someone up out of where they are and to put them into a better place, so that they might be in accord with the will of God. The loveless judgment that Jesus condemns is a judgment which only destroys.

And Christians, God has done the same thing for us, too. We have been judged according to our sins, and we deserved that judgment, but God did not simply tear us down to leave us in the dust. God has judged sin in his Son Jesus Christ. And he has judged it in Jesus so that we would be lifted up, so that we would become Christians. He has shown us this love and this forgiveness and mercy in Jesus, so that we would become better than what we are. We are called to do the same thing, because we are imitating our heavenly Father.

Jesus says, "Give and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you." Are we fair in our dealings with one another? Are we generous in our dealings with one another? Because this is what Jesus is talking about here. And he's using the imagery of measuring things, so imagine we're in the kitchen, for example. How do you accurately measure brown sugar? You get out your cup, and you pack it in, right? You press it down so that we have a fair, accurate measure of how much we need. Or sometimes when we have flour, for example, you know flour has a tendency to create gaps and holes when you're measuring it. Sometimes you have to tap it a little bit, to shake it a little bit in order to get a fair and an accurate measurement. You could also think in terms of a bag that we're filling up with something like grain. Sometimes you have to shake it a little bit to make sure that it gets into all the corners. Sometimes you have to press it down to make sure you get enough. Because the goal there ultimately is to make sure that we're getting the right amount. We're not trying to cheat anyone. We are being fair in our dealings with other people. But Jesus says it's running over, even. Once we have that accurately measured bag, it's like throwing a whole bunch more on top besides. Because we are generous with one another, showing that kind of undeserved generosity, that undeserved more that we in the first place never deserved at all. Jesus says that God sends his rain on the just and the unjust alike. His own enemies have received his abundant generosity of rain, of home, of everything that we have, because that's the kind of God that we serve, a God who shows his generosity and his fairness even to those who don't give him the time of day.

So does that characterize our dealings with one another, Christians? Do we try to cheat our neighbors in the our dealings, especially someone we don't know, giving them something we know is broken, but we sell it to them anyway because we're gonna come

out on top in this deal? Do we cheat them out of a fair measurement of something, whatever the case might be? Or in a moral sense, are we fair in our dealings with how we treat one another, putting the best construction on things, dealing with each other as we want them to deal with us? Because that's what it means to be a Christian, to show that same kind of fairness, that same kind of generosity, toward one another that God has first shown towards us.

Because as Jesus says here, a disciple is not above his teacher. And when a disciple is fully trained, he will be like his teacher in everything. We are being shaped. We are being molded to become like God in the way that he thinks, in the way that he acts, and everything that he does. Because the alternative, Christians, is, as Jesus says, hypocrisy. That kind of unfairness, that kind of self-serving love for ourselves that ultimately seeks our own advantage. As Jesus says in words that we probably all know very well, "Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me take out the speck that is in your eye,' when you yourself do not see the log that is in your own eye?"

Again, Jesus is not saying here that there is never a time to correct someone else, to point out the sins of someone else. Jesus even says at the very end of this passage that we can see clearly to take out the speck in someone else's eye, but that doesn't happen until we first, as it were, set our own house in order. Because if we are trying to correct other people or trying to condemn other people for their sins, and never actually deal with our own sins, that is the very essence of hypocrisy. We have no room to speak. And it's exactly that kind of judging, exactly that kind of lovelessness, that nitpicking in someone else, that tearing down, that Jesus is condemning here. But how easy is that to do, Christians! We see that going on in our nation today. People who are condemning others for sins, no matter how big or how small or how imaginary, even if they lived in the past, saying that we can no longer say anything about these kinds of people. We have to erase them from history, as if there was no way we could say a good thing about these people. But it is exactly that kind of tearing down, exactly that kind of nitpicking, that Jesus is speaking about today.

But we are called to correct one another. We are called to warn one another, but when we do that in a spirit of love, in the way that God does, we will build up and not tear down. Because hypocrisy only seeks to destroy, but God seeks to build us up. And when we correct with the goal of building someone else up, we are doing so in a spirit of love. One that recognizes our own failings, one that recognizes that we too need to be forgiven, but with that recognition, we can then say to our brother, "Brother, let me help you. Let me help you come out of the sin in which you are in. Let me help you take out that speck that is in your eye."

Jesus has done the same thing for us too, Christians, because he always sought to do what was right first, even when it made him unpopular. Not that he needed to be forgiven. Don't get me wrong here. But Jesus tried to please his heavenly Father in everything--and he did--so that he could then turn to us and say in a spirit of love, "Brother, let me take out the speck that is in your eye." Because he has sought to build up and not to tear

down.

So Christians, we are the children of God, and we are called to imitate our heavenly Father. To think like him, to be like him, to act like him, to show mercy like him, to love one another like him, to forgive as we have been forgiven, to be fair to one another as he has been fair to us, to be generous to one another as he has been generous to us, and ultimately to build up as he builds us up, because we are his people. As Jesus says, "Even the world will know that you are my disciples by the love that you have for one another." And that love is shown forth by thinking and acting like Jesus in everything.

To him be the glory, now and forever. Amen.