



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

www.mzluth.org

February 23, 2025

Pastor David Ruddat

7th Sunday after Epiphany

First Lesson: [Genesis 45:3–15](#)

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 103 (*Red Hymnal*)

Second Lesson: [Romans 12:14–21](#)

Gospel Lesson/ Sermon Text: [Luke 6:27-38](#)

EPIPHANY MOMENTS

Love Your Enemies; Overcoming Evil with Good **HOW TO HANDLE YOUR NEIGHBOR'S MORAL FAILINGS**

Welcome to worship today at Morrison Zion Lutheran Church. We exist to glorify God. We have set out to do this by gathering around the Gospel so that we may grow in the Gospel and go to others with this Gospel.

Grace, mercy and peace are yours from God our Father through our Lord and our Savior Jesus Christ.

*Direct us now, O gracious Lord, to hear aright your Holy Word.
Assist your minister to preach, and let the Holy Spirit teach.
Let eternal life be found by all who hear the Gospel sound. Amen.*

Dear friends in Christ:

I want to begin this morning by just asking a question—what do you expect from sermons here at Morrison Zion Lutheran Church? What do you expect? A joke or two? A good story? Points to take home? Do you ever expect the messages to be tough? It's amazing that you're here because you are hearing God's Word, but really what happens in sermons from this place, preached to you from pastors who have served you and are serving you, are tough messages.

Today is an example of that. It's tough because first of all, it's been misused. When you are trying to live out your calling as a Christian and call other people to repentance so that they in turn would see Jesus, if you are trying to plant those seeds in other people's hearts, do you know what they are going to say to you and they have said to you? They'll quote Jesus here. They'll say "Don't judge lest you be judged. Don't you judge me." It's hard to hear these words because if that's what you're thinking about, this struggle that you're having in trying to call people to repentance, they use this passage out of context. So let's give you the context today.

It's also a difficult sermon to hear today because it hits us where it hurts. It confronts us where we probably feel the most confident—that is when we look at ourselves and we look at our neighbor. When we look at our neighbor, whether that neighbor is Christian or not, we can say "You know, compared to them, I'm pretty good. They have to get their act together. I've got it all together. They had better come to me because I have my act together and they do not. I don't swear. They swear. I don't gossip, but oh boy, they gossip!" This text today hits us where it hurts because when we feel good about ourselves is what happens when we look down on someone else.

So as we look at God's Word for us as Jesus' words for us, let's look at them the way that Jesus intended—as a "how to"—**how to handle your neighbor's moral failings.**

1. Jesus tells us if you are here, your neighbor's moral failings will also be here. The blessing of coming here to hear God's Word, and it is amazing that we are here (or we're watching) to hear and listen to God's Word, is that God's Word changes you. It changes you because you're not the same person that you once were. Maybe you were a person that swore a lot, but now, by God's power and His forgiveness and His sacrament of forgiveness in the Lord's Supper, the Holy Spirit has moved you to say "I am not going to take God's name in vain." It's amazing you're still coming here because God, in His Word, gives us tough messages to hear because God wants to change even you. He is calling us out of this world. He is calling us away from our sinful nature. He is calling us to a new life, a new way of doing things—His way of doing things. As God does that, we recognize that people around us aren't listening to God's Word. And that was true even in Jesus' day.

Did you catch that at the beginning of our text for today? Jesus gave this beautiful sermon and then He has this seemingly throwaway line. ²⁷***"But to you who are listening I say..."*** Can you imagine that? Could anyone possibly not be listening to Jesus? Yes, because they have the same sinful nature as people have today, as our neighbors have today, as WE have today. It's amazing that God, in His Word, continues to work. He continues to change us every day. Through contrition, through confessing our sins, through repentance and turning back to Him, through forgiveness (whether spoken or given to us in the Lord's Supper), we're not the same. Our morals have changed. Our ethics have changed. And we're living in the midst of the world that still has a moral compass, but it's pointing in the wrong direction.

As we come here and hear God's Word, our compasses have been pointed back to God's direction. Then we go out into the world and the world has its ideas of what is right and wrong. It's firing off that *this is right and this is wrong. You're cancelled. You're cancelled. You can't do that. You can't say that.* But our

compass has been restored through the work of God—through His Word and sacrament.

But we are always going to be living amongst people who need their compasses realigned. And WE are always going to be people who need our compasses realigned. That's why it's so amazing that we are together. We all have sins that we struggle with. Sometimes they are different from somebody else's sins, but that's why we are together. Maybe we don't struggle with swearing, but we can encourage the person who does. Pick your sin. Maybe we don't struggle with gossip, but we can encourage the person who does. The person who is struggling and saying "I know I shouldn't gossip so much" is looking up to the person who doesn't. We're all in this together. We are a church family that needs Jesus. So we care for each other.

When we look at our neighbor, whether that neighbor is a Christian or whether they are not, there is going to be a difference in their moral failings. But Jesus is talking to us about what it's like to live among Christians who aren't the same as us. Jesus encourages us always to be givers. Did you catch that in the text? How many times He is saying "Don't do things because you'll get something back"? We are to be givers. Give, not what we want to get in return, not in response to what we could have gotten or what we might be getting, but give—always more and above what we get.

We live in a world that is always reciprocating. The world says "The golden rule" but really, it's not living by the golden rule. The world is living by "You be nice to me and I'll be nice to you," or "I'll be nice to you because I think you'll be nice to me." It's always self-centered, but that's not what Jesus says. Jesus says, "Do good to others as you would have them do to you. Just do. Just give. No expectations. No reciprocity. God has shown you mercy, so you show mercy to someone else."

How has God shown you mercy? In God's sight, you and I are different than He is—we're sinners. We don't live up to His standard. You want to talk about moral failings between us and God? It's huge! But in His great mercy, because He saw there was this inequality between us and Him, He sent His Son Jesus to live a perfect life for us. His innocent death and His resurrection were given so that God would look at you and me and say "This is my child. We're on the same standing. We're on the same footing with one another." This is God's gift to us. We don't deserve it. We haven't earned it. He has balanced out the scales.

Now Jesus encourages you to do the same for others—to be like this to others: ³⁶***Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.*** As Christ is to you, you are to them. That's why Jesus says "***Love your enemies...***" There's a difference

between you and your enemy. Of course we ask ourselves, “Who is my enemy, pastor?” Those who are opposed to you for whatever reason—maybe your personalities don’t get along, maybe they are damaged in some way, maybe they are jealous of what you have, where there is some sort of animosity between you and someone else and Jesus says you are to be Christ to them. Show them mercy. You’re on unequal footing. Be a giver.

That can only come when you reflect on God’s mercy to you. It doesn’t come naturally. What comes naturally is that giving I have been given from God. What comes naturally is I’m going to treat you the same way you treat me. That feels right. But our compass has been skewed. So Jesus corrects our compass and says “Be like Christ to someone else. Show people mercy. If someone curses you, you bless them. You pray for the enemies.” That’s tough! It’s different.

2. Whether your neighbor is a Christian or not, I will behave toward them differently than the world expects. If they want to get aggressive and start a fight, I will behave differently than what the world expects because I want them to see Jesus. I want them to see a merciful God who forgives sinners like me and like them. Jesus empowers us and equips us through His wonderful Word as we reflect on His mercy towards us, His forgiveness towards us that gives us the power to be merciful and to be forgiving towards others. As we reflect on how God takes care of us, we always have God on our side because of Jesus. We always have a God who cares for us and will take care of us. So when Jesus says “When your enemy looks for your coat, give them your shirt because God is in your corner.” The God of the universe is the one who is going to make sure you have some clothes to wear. This is the kind of confidence that nobody can take away no matter what the situation. We have Christ in our corner, taking care of us, forgiving us, giving us mercy when we don’t deserve it. He is kind to the unthankful and the evil, Jesus says. And that starts with us. It starts with Him being kind to the unthankful and the evil so that we in turn can be kind to the unthankful and the evil. That leads us to the last point.
3. You are Christs (with or without the apostrophe).
 - a. First without—you are Christs in this world. Jesus says “Judge not and you will not be judged. Do not condemn and you will not be condemned. Forgive and you will be forgiven.” In this world, if we are here in God’s Word, if we have God’s Word changing us, we’re always going to be surrounded by people who are morally failing in comparison to us. What is the temptation? What is the temptation when you are around people who are not living up to even your own standards? That’s where the context comes for judge not lest ye be judged.

Can I get personal for a second? This is hard for me to hear. Even as a young man suffering injustices, holding onto God's moral compass has always been a big thing for me. God, in His Word, has always kept me on that compass. Yes, I have strayed, but it has been important to do what is right and ethical. But I am surrounded by people who don't seem to care. Whether it's in the world, maybe even in a church, I *think why aren't these people watching their life and their doctrine as closely as I am?* "Do not judge," Jesus says. You are Christs in the world. All of us are. And we are to be Christs to other people.

Jesus said "The Son of Man did not come to condemn but to save."

John 3:17: For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Yes, He is coming to judge the living and the dead. We confess that in the Apostles Creed. We know that is the case. But it is so easy for the Christian to sit on the side of reality at the end of all things, when the judgment is going to come. We like to sit there instead of right now, where Jesus is, but He says "You be Christs. You be the people who save other people." You point out their sin so that you can share Jesus with them. You can plant the seeds of the Gospel in their hearts. Yes, they are going to be morally different than you, but that's not the point. Don't dwell on that. Be Christs. Be Christ to them. How often did Jesus point out "You know guys, I'm so much better than all the rest of you" as He went and did His life? How much was He not there for them? Giving, it was one way.

Ever since we started that "Fun Day" at Immanuel, I've been there in the mornings and thinking about what it was like to be a parent of little ones like that. I remember the joke I used to give my kids when they were little babies sitting there on the changing table. I would say "I've changed your diaper five times today and not one 'Thank you' from you." So oftentimes when it comes to being a parent, we're living out that one direction. We are giving, giving, giving—being Christs to our children. It's a hard message to say you need to keep doing it because you feel like you're empty and there's nothing left. That's why you have to put the apostrophe back in there.

- b. You are Christ's. You are His dearly loved children. You are His. Whether male or female, young or old, you are the sons of the Most High God as Jesus says. That's why He has that interesting farming term when He says ***"A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap."*** Again, it's not that hard of a picture. You can imagine in the agricultural world where they are going to try to do everything to make sure the scales are just right so you pay more for the

grain that you are buying or pay more for the seeds that you are buying, but Jesus says what you get from the Lord is like someone going to the market and they are pouring grain into your lap and it's so packed in there that it's overflowing. It reminds you of what David said a thousand years earlier in [Psalm 23](#). ***You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.***

You ARE Christ's. He made you His dear child, through water in Baptism. He made you His dear child through water and Word in Baptism. You are His!

It's a hard teaching that we talked about today, but God does not leave us alone to do it. He equips us through His Word. And by the Holy Spirit's power working through that Word, we will do the things that Christ has called us to do. These are hard teachings, but they lead us to Christ. They lead us to remind ourselves who we are. We are recipients of God's wonderful blessings. God, who is in our corner, who forgives us all of our sins, who takes care of us day by day and the blessings He gives us cannot be contained. They just spill over. As we look at our neighbor and their moral failings, we are reminded who we are and what our calling is to serve them; Amen.

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. [\(Philippians 4:7\)](#) Amen.