

**Easter 6 Year A 2020**  
**May 17, 2020**  
**Sermon**

Alleluia! Christ is risen! **Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

I don't know about you, but I find that it's really easy to be judgmental of one another these days. There are so many fears and stressors and opinions about the coronavirus and social distancing, that it's nearly impossible to avoid people that disagree with your point of view. I do my best to stick to the facts—read the scientific studies, follow CDC guidelines, and avoid media that seeks to present opinions as fact. But even still, between social media and the number of people I regularly encounter in various ways, it's hard to avoid getting into an argument. In fact, in a moment of poor judgement this week, I got into an argument with a friend of a family member on Facebook over the measures that were being taken to prevent the spread of the virus throughout our country. The argument quickly moved from facts and science to insults, name-calling, and worse. It was not that individual's, nor my own most righteous or loving moment.

But it's so easy to fall into these arguments these days, especially with the stressors we're all facing, and with social media or email where you can just type away and not have to muster up the courage to say something directly to someone's face. And even if you don't have a computer, all you have to do is turn on the TV or open the newspaper to find that these arguments are happening everywhere, including on the steps of our state Capitol.

It's so easy to judge our neighbors, especially when issues like life and death, public safety, freedom, and money are the topics of the hour. But a life of judgment is not the life to which we have been called.

In today's gospel reading, Jesus tells us, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." Now, this translation is a little misleading, because it seems to say that if we love Jesus, we will be able to obey the commandments perfectly. A better translation for "keep" might be "hold dear" or "consider important". "If you love me, you will hold my commandments dear." This strays from mere obedience of the commandments to instead having a positive attitude toward the commandments, knowing that they are important for us, important to God, and important for creating community with our neighbors. If we love Jesus, we hold the commandments dear, and we *want* to follow them, even if we can't do so perfectly.

And as we strive to follow the commandments, avoiding judging one another is a part of that. The 8<sup>th</sup> commandment says that we shall not bear false witness against our neighbor. In the strictest sense, we might say that this only requires that we don't lie about our neighbors in court. However, when Martin Luther explains this commandment, he expands its meaning by saying, "We are to fear and love God, so that we do not tell lies about our neighbors, betray or slander them, or destroy their reputations. Instead we are to come to their defense, speak well of them, and interpret everything they do in the best possible light." That last line is one that I *try* to keep in the front of my mind: "Interpret everything our neighbors do in the best possible light." This commandment, along with Jesus' command to love one another, means that we are not to judge one another. We are called to love our neighbors, and assume the best of their actions.

Now, this doesn't mean that "anything goes", or that someone that is putting us or another person in danger should be allowed to do so. "Not passing judgment" is *not* the same as allowing people to be put in danger. But when we interpret our neighbor's actions in the best

possible light, we are assuming that they are acting in a way that they believe is best for the community, that their values are different from our own, or that they are simply uninformed.

This also doesn't mean that we'd better love our neighbors and refrain from judgement, *or else* God won't love us. God's love for us is unconditional, and God promises to forgive us when we fail to love our neighbors.

But this does mean that we are called to love one another, because this is the mark of the Christian way of life. "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." As people who love Jesus, Christians are called to live differently than the rest of the world, allowing their actions to be motivated by love. Where the rest of the world chooses judgment, hatred, violence, and animosity, Christians are called to choose love above all else.

This is a life of transformation that is led by the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth. The Holy Spirit that Christ promises to us abides in us, and guides us to truth and love. We may not have the power on our own to resist judgment, but as we rely on the Holy Spirit and as we pray for the Spirit's guidance, we are empowered to love more fully than we are able on our own.

And even when we fail to love our neighbors, even when we cannot follow Jesus' commandments, and even when we don't act like we've been transformed by the Holy Spirit, God still loves us, and God offers us forgiveness and mercy.

We are living in a time when it is so easy to pass judgment rather than interpret our neighbor's actions in the best possible light. But God calls us to love, and the Holy Spirit abiding in us empowers us to do so. Let us live lives that share this love with others, and let us trust that God forgives us when we fall short. Thanks be to God. Amen.