

SERMON - THE 6TH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY - 11 JULY 2010
St. John's Anglican Church, Greensboro, North Carolina

Matthew 5:20 (KJV)

Jesus said, For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus calls us all to a life of righteousness and He tells us that if our life of righteousness doesn't go beyond the superficial, if it doesn't go beyond the surface, we will in no case enter the kingdom of heaven

There is a passage from the prophet Hosea that is used as one of the canticles at Friday Morning Prayers in the Church of England. In this passage is a line that ties appropriately with today's Gospel, that echoes those words of Jesus.

Hosea 6:6 (KJV) For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.

It is what we have in our hearts not what we do liturgically that matters. We can have the most beautiful masses with all sorts of sacred music and with our clergy and servers vested in the most handsome way possible, we can have all that but if we do not have the love of God in our hearts, we have nothing.

For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.

One day we all are going to be judged. One day we all are going to come face to face with our Lord and be judged not on how well we chanted the mass or on how well we sang in the choir or how well we can quote scripture.

One day we will come face to face with our Lord and we will be judged by how we

showed mercy, on how well we loved others, how we fed the hungry, how we clothed the naked, how we loved each other as Christ loved us.

We are going to be judged how righteous we are, how we live our lives as God would want us to, how we have made God central in our lives.

We are going to be judged by how merciful we were to others.

Do you remember the parable of the slave that owed his master a fortune but even after his master forgave him all that debt, he did not forgive his fellow slave the debt owed him.

Unless our righteousness exceeds the pharisaical superficiality that is so prevalent in most of our churches, we don't have a snowball's chance in Hell.

We are all called to be Christian. We are called to be Christian with all of our hearts, with all of our souls and with all of our minds. We are called to love each other in the same way. We are called to be Christians without any other agenda than to be Christ's own.

We are called to be merciful. What is mercy?

In the New Testament there several Greek word that are translated as "mercy." One is Eleo is used to denote, to signify sympathy with the misery of another, much like the Spanish word, *simpatico*. Jesus felt compassion on the multitudes. Jesus had mercy on the multitudes. In the prayer of the Publican in Luke 18:13, the word used there when the publican prayed "Have mercy on me, a sinner." is from a root word which means have propitiation on me, in other words, "He was praying save me, heal me, forgive me."

All these; healing, forgiveness of sins and deliverance from death are wrapped up in the term "mercy."

For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.

We can perform all the religious rituals that we have in our bag of tricks from now until the day of Judgment, but we do not have mercy towards others, if we do not have the love of God in our hearts, if we do not have humility, those rituals will not get us anywhere. It is not that the rituals are wrong, but when they become a substitute for real religion, a substitute for righteousness, a substitute for charity, the love of God that we are supposed to have and that we are supposed to give to others, the ritual becomes meaningless.

That is what Paul is telling us in 1 Cor. 13:2-3 (KJV) when he writes, *And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. [3] And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.*

The key is love, God's love, God's merciful love.

Without God's love we are nothing, nothing at all.

Amen.