

## Do Your Christian Duty

- ‡ **Watching out for the little ones** (vv.1-3)
- ‡ **Sincerely forgiving each other** (vv.3-6)
- ‡ **Humbly serving the Master** (vv.7-10)

In the Name of Jesus, God's faithful Servant, dearly redeemed Christians:

Luke carefully records that *“Jesus went through towns and villages, teaching as he made his way to Jerusalem.”* At one point along the way Jesus expressed centuries of God's anguish for that city: *“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!”* (Luke 13:22,34 NIV84) In our self-absorbed society it's hard to imagine this kind of unselfish, selfless love. God tells us, **Do Your Christian Duty**, because of His longing to save others.

Maybe in the military you learned a strong sense of duty for God and country. But most of us would understand it better if I reminded you of those two park rangers walking through a burned out forest. They came upon the heartbreaking sight of a charred bird rigid by a smoldering trunk of a tree. One tapped the bird with his foot. As she fell over, several baby chicks scampered out from under her. While the flames roared toward them, the hen had gathered her chicks under her wings. She gave her life to protect them. That's how God feels about every single soul. **Do Your Christian Duty**, especially...

### ‡ **Watching out for the little ones** (vv.1-3)

One of the few times Jesus got really upset with His disciples was when they tried to keep parents from bringing their kids. Remember that? *“Jesus called the children to him and said, ‘Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.’”* (18:16f NIV84) Modern Christians who insist kids have to reach “the age of reason” have mixed up reason with faith. Jesus puts it the other way around. Adults need to become like little children in childlike faith.

But when it comes to doing **Your Christian Duty**, Jesus is talking about more than just kids here. *Jesus said to his disciples: “Things that cause people to sin are bound to come, but woe to that person through whom they come.”* The original Greek uses the word *skandalon* (cf. “scandal”) for the stick in a death trap. If the animal takes the bait, it pulls the stick and drops the trap on itself. Sin is always deadly because the guilt of every sin must be paid to God. It's bad enough when we take Satan's bait and believe his lies about money, sex, friends, power, position – or whatever. But when you are the one who loads the death trap by tempting someone else, Jesus warns you: *“It would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around his neck than for him to cause one of these little ones to sin.”*

Tripping up *“little ones”* also includes young Christians, still immature in their faith. It's one of the things that scares me most about being a pastor. Jesus says, *“Watch yourselves.”* God takes it very seriously if you or I say or do something that trips someone up in their faith or traps them in some sin. So these “scandalizing, death-trap sins” will come, but *“Woe”* to whoever brings them. Later the Holy Spirit through James piles on another warning, *“Not many of you should be teachers...because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly. We all stumble in many ways. If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check.”* (3:1f) Think for instance, how sensitive we've become to racism which is a sin in God's sight. You'd be doing me a favor if you ever heard it from my lips and took me aside to admonish me. **Do Your Christian Duty** – how again? By...

## ✠ Sincerely forgiving each other (vv.3-6)

Some may see red flags popping up here. These days it seems everything is taken as racism, even when it's not meant. Someone said last week that if you say we are of the "human race," it can be taken as diminishing someone's race. Apparently, everyone sins by racism of some sort. So how does Jesus help us with folks who are better at pointing out the sins of others than confessing their own?

Following Jesus is really hard on your personal pride. It cannot survive the onslaught of God's truth. Jesus takes His disciples back to school, you might even say, "back to the woodshed," with more on how to **Do Your Christian Duty**. Remember that place where Jesus taught us to say, "**Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us**"? Yes, that's the Lord's Prayer. Jesus also says there is torment waiting for you, "**If you do not forgive your brother from your heart.**" (Matthew 18:35) To bring this into sharp focus, Jesus tells us today it's not just once or twice. Even if your brother sins against you seven times in a day, then comes back to repent, "**forgive him.**"

**Do your Christian Duty.** Love as you've been loved; forgive as you've been forgiven. "But, Pastor, doesn't God also forgive and forget? I can forgive, but I can't forget." Then God says you're not really forgiving because that's how God forgave you. Under the New Covenant of pure grace God has only one stipulation: "**Their sins and iniquities I will remember no more.**" (Hebrews 10:7 KJV)

See why Jesus' disciples pleaded: "**Lord, increase our faith!**" But here's a fact for your comfort and understanding. Even small faith can do great things: "**If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it will obey you.**" So you can take that wiggling worm of bitterness and resentment, put it on a hook and cast it far away. Reel it in and find the trophy fish of forgiveness on your line. How? Every time you think of that certain someone who sinned against you, ask God to forgive him or her again. Then your memories become another opportunity to pray for them. Sanctified memories can help you **Do Your Christian Duty**....

## ✠ Humbly serving the Master (vv.7-10)

Speaking of wiggling worms, there's a tapeworm of self-righteousness that won't let go of your spiritual digestive tract. Let's say you're so easy going that you just don't hold grudges – or at least that's what you think. So you hear Jesus talk about forgiveness and figure you've got that one licked. You don't even realize your wheels are swerving into the ditch of self-righteousness, thinking God owes you for doing good. Totally understandable. All the world's religions are built on work righteousness. Our Lutheran Confessions point out that this *opinio legis* infects the hearts and minds of all. But Jesus knows it's deadly. He warns you and me to **Do Your Christian Duty** by **Humbly serving the Master**.

To put Jesus' parable in modern terms, imagine coming over a hill and seeing a state patrol officer with his speed gun aimed right at you. Your foot instinctively goes to the brake. You glance at your speedometer. Seems everything is fine, but he's pulling you over anyway! Now he's writing something on a piece of paper! No way! It's a check for \$250 and a note: "Way to go! You were honoring the speed limit." Sure – and drill sergeants hand out fluffy bunnies when you march and do your pushups!

Lesson? Even if you could do everything right in full obedience to God's commands, always with a happy heart, loving God and your neighbor.... "**when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.'**" That's our view as Jesus says.

But God's view? Jesus said in a previous parable: "**It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. I tell you the truth, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them.**" (12:37 NIV84) God's Son so wants to serve us in heaven that He shed His blood to wash away every sin of selfish pride and prejudice. **Do Your Christian Duty** in gratitude by Gospel power. Jesus wants you and everyone you know at His table in the heavenly wedding banquet on the Last Day. Such awesome wonder – our Savior's love! Amen.