

Trinity 4 (2026)

Think of a rosebud. It is attractive in its own way. It certainly should not be despised, yet there would be something wrong if it remained a bud.

No, the goal is for it to open and become a full flower, and, depending on the variety, to give off a delicious smell.

So it is with Jesus' people.

Checking the "I believe" box is the first step, and a necessary one. But as with the rosebud something more needs to happen. It needs to open . . . to spread its petals . . . to give off a sweet-smelling fragrance . . . to become all that God intended it to be.

In the case of individuals, if that doesn't happen, the witness of the Church is minished,

and that person does not flourish in the way God wants him or her to.

Changing metaphors, I have four tomato plants out back of the parish house. Some weeks ago, blossoms began to appear on those plants, and now there are little green tomatoes.

Let's go back and posit a different scenario . . . that nothing came of those blossoms . . . that they never developed and no fruit appeared.

It would be disappointing to say the very least.

Again, translate that picture into the Christian life. Christ's people are intended to yield fruit. If that doesn't happen, there is a problem.

It just so happens that growth, development and bearing fruit is the over-arching theme of the season of the church year in which we find

ourselves. Trinity-tide is a season of growth. The green hangings in the church serve as reminders.

We don't want to be stunted rosebuds or blossoms without fruit.

Our aim is to be beautiful, fragrant, productive members of the Lord's family, and Jesus in today's Gospel reading give us some pointers as to what that might look like.

This reading comes from St. Luke's version of the Sermon on the Mount. Here the Master speaks of how His people are to live out their faith in the world.

The world at large does it one way; they are to do it quite another.

Instead of a get-even spirit, they are to exhibit a merciful one.

Instead of a what-mine-is-mine spirit, a generous one.

Instead of a closed-minded judgmental spirit, a discerning one.

Put another way, they are to have **open hearts, open hands and open eyes.**

Let's look at each, beginning with the first, **open hearts.**

“Be ye merciful, even as your Father also is merciful,” says Jesus.

God has an open heart to fallible, weak, erring human beings. He extends His love to us while we are still sinners. We should follow His example.

Put another way, as we have received mercy, we should extend mercy.

In another place, Jesus illustrates this principle with a story . . . the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant (Matthew 18:21-25).

In this story, one servant owed his master a huge sum, an amount well beyond his ability to pay. The only thing this servant could do was to plead for mercy, which he did. In response, his master forgave the entire debt . . . an extraordinary act of generosity.

But the story does not end here. The servant the master forgave immediately went out and confronted a fellow servant who owed him a paltry sum and demanded payment. When this servant could not pay and pled for mercy, he turned a deaf ear and had his fellow servant thrown into jail.

Of course, we are left thinking what a miserable man he was. He was the lowest of the low!

Yet, if we look closer at ourselves, we may well discover we are the man. We act in this manner when we refuse to let go of old slights and hurts . . . when we refuse to forgive as we have been forgiven . . . when we fail to show mercy as we have been shown mercy by God.

As I said last week, the way of today's culture is to 'cancel' those who don't measure up to your standard and with whom you disagree.

Followers of Jesus are called to go in the opposite direction . . . to be ready to forgive . . . to be generous in their judgments . . . to have open hearts.

What about your heart? What about mine? Are they open? Are we kind, forgiving, ready to go the other mile with others? Can people see Jesus in us? If not, that rose bud is not yet opened.

Let's move to our second 'open' -- **open hands.**

“Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom,” says Jesus.

The imagery here is drawn from grain dealing in the Middle East. The generous dealer would press down the grain and shake it after measuring it out. It would then be poured into a fold or pocket formed from the buyer's robe.

Christ's followers are to act in like manner. They are to be generous in spirit and deed

It has been said, **“You can't outgive God.”**

Many will testify to the truth of these words. The more they give of their money, time and talent, the more they find they have to give.

God is the great multiplier. Why not put Him to the test?

Generosity marks people out as credible Christians.

Stingy, miserly behavior as something less; really, a lack of trust in God's promised provisions.

Open hearts, open hands and finally **open eyes.**

Jesus teaches this last precept in the parable of the blind leading the blind found at the end of this morning's reading.

Religious leaders seem to be especially in view here, but no Christian is left out.

The scribes and Pharisees in Jesus' day claimed to be eagerly looking for the arrival of the Kingdom of God and the Messiah. But when

God's Anointed showed up, they not only refused to believe themselves but sought to keep others from believing. They were blind guides.

Religious leaders today must be careful not to follow in their footsteps.

They must be spiritually enlightened so they can bring light to others.

They must be able to see clearly themselves – have open eyes -- before they can bring correction to others . . . which God's ministers and teachers at times must do.

To be in this position, they must sieve their thoughts and actions through the revealed word of truth – the holy scriptures.

By the same token, people in the pews need to be on the lookout for blind teachers and not to be led astray by them.

How do they do this?

By opening *their* eyes to the things found in the sacred scriptures and by learning how to apply them in a meaningful way.

That is why the studies we have here at St. Luke's are so important. They are not just to impart knowledge for the sake of knowledge, but to foster a discerning spirit . . . that is, to give people the tools they need to make right judgments, and so to make them credible Christians.

Phony-baloney Christians are quick in their judgments of others but blind to their own faults. To borrow a phrase from Ray Steven's Mississippi squirrel revival song, they are the "Burtha Better Than Yous" of the pews.

Credible Christians, meanwhile, refrain from judging hastily and without knowledge. They seek to address their own shortcomings before

tackling those of others. When they are called upon to correct someone else, they do so with wisdom and gentleness.

Phony-baloney Christians turn people away from Christ and His Church. Credible ones draw them. What kind of Christians are we?

Now more than ever, credible Christians are needed.

We've all heard of "ugly Americans," those who go abroad with a condescending spirit and who bring shame and ridicule on this country.

There are also "ugly Christians," people who look down on those who don't follow *their* rules and who use their Bibles as weapons. In so doing these ugly Christians discredit the Gospel of Christ and bring scorn and ridicule on His Church.

Jesus in today's Gospel points us down a different path. He wants His people to be winsome and provocative, flowering and producing fruit.

Are you such a Christian? Am I?

With that said, we shouldn't worry if we still have a way to go before becoming that sort of Christian. We are all works in progress.

But there should be growth. More than that, Jesus in today's Gospel has not left us with some vague generalities as to what this growth should look like.

Rather, He has given us three things we can go to work on immediately . . . indeed in this coming week. What are they? **Open hearts, open hands, and open eyes.**

Green is for growth. Let's go for the green!