



LESSONS IN LIVING

“Judge Not”

A St. Andrew's Sermon
Delivered by Dr. Jim Rigby
September 7, 2025

Scripture Reading: Matthew 7:1-5 (*The Inclusive Bible*)
(Jesus is teaching) *“Don't judge, or you yourself will be judged. Your judgment on others will be the judgment you receive. The measure you use will be used to measure you. Why do you look at the splinter in your neighbor's eye and never see the board in your own eye? How can you say to your neighbor, 'Let me remove the splinter in your eye,' when the whole time there's a two-by-four in your own? Hypocrite! Remove the board from your own eye first; then you'll be able to see clearly to remove the splinter from your neighbor's eye.”*

Sermon

We're looking today at one of the hardest passages in scripture, not to judge. And to take you off the hook to realize that it's not always possible. In the middle of this teaching, Jesus calls people hypocrites. (*Laughter*) Don't be surprised if you find yourself slipping on this one because it's not always possible. We catch ourselves after we've done things. No one has broken this saying more than the Christian church. Nobody has sat in judgment anywhere near as much as the Church has, which is a very strange fact.

A couple of things just before we start, the footnotes. One is that the word “*to judge*” in Hebrew had connotations of power. The judges were governors. Some of it is Jesus's anarchy. He didn't believe anybody should have power over anyone else. We leave that out so we can have our church hierarchies. We also leave out the socialism in the name of not being political. But if we don't share the world, there's going to be all these terrible problems. One of the reasons we don't, one of the reasons we can't do it is we get lost in judgments.

Again, it's very hard right now, when you see the pain, when you see the injustice, we have a duty to stand up for the people being damaged. I think force is sometimes necessary. I don't think hate is *ever* necessary. I don't think hate *ever* brings anything to the game that we feel good about afterwards. That if there is going to be confrontation, it needs to be done in full sanity. When we talk about love, we're not just talking about a feeling. It's like a whole approach to life.

Think about the times when you've lost control and you call somebody a name. Does that ever feel good? The times when you've caught yourself judging other people are probably not very happy times. So as we look at the imploding nature of our politics right now, I don't know what

you need to do in terms of resistance. But what I'm hoping is you can keep your heart open, keep your mind open as we go through this and not have those things shut down. The Governor of California, Gavin Newsom, is trying the strategy of using Trump's inflammatory rhetoric against him. Now, again, I don't know what he needs to do. I don't know what you need to do. But in terms of myself, I don't want to go there.

I think we can teach people a whole lot better if we don't sink to the level of name calling. We need compassion, but we also need *reason*. And that's exactly what we lose when we fall into the storm and start just trading names. Some of the smartest people I know on Facebook go crazy, start calling people names, and they might as well be three years old. They throw away the most powerful traits that compassionate people have. The reason, the sense of humor, compassion. Those are the things the world needs right now, and it's understandable why people would throw that overboard.

I think Jesus is trying to help us not do that. I also think that what he's saying is there's just a mathematical equation here. I don't think he's saying God sits there with a calculator, and when you judge another person, "*OK, that's three points against that person.*" I think what he's saying is that when we fall into judgment, we shut down some of the best parts of ourselves. And ultimately, it snaps back on us. It hurts us. The measure we use on other people, we may not mean it at the time, but it comes back to hurt us.

I think there's three reasons, at least, that people fall into judgment. We do, and other people do. The first is that we get afraid. So many people right now in the United States feel like they've lost control. A lot of that is that systems of justice are being shut down. A lot of the people of privilege are feeling really scared right now. Bishop Tutu in South Africa said one of the most amazing things any human being has ever said. I still don't understand it, but I admire it. During the midst of the struggle when apartheid was just so murderous, he said "*We will never get free until we can hear the cries of our oppressors.*"

We don't necessarily need that for the resistance part, but if we're going to build a livable world, we need to remember that the pieces have got to fit together at the end of this thing. The President, this week (any week). . . (*Laughter*) I'm trying to have you not figure out what my politics are. Also, I can't call any names. . . I ran across this paragraph this week. Trump signed an Executive Order Friday to brand the Pentagon as the "Department of War." This is the guy that wants the Nobel Peace Prize. (*Laughter*) But I think that's probably a good idea. When you call your War Department the Department of Defense, there's some insanity there, too. At least take responsibility for it.

But then he said something that would have been unthinkable 50 years ago. He hinted again that Chicago will be invaded by federal troops. There was a picture of him like in *Apocalypse Now*, one of the generals. He said, "*I love the smell of deportations in the morning. Chicago is about to find out why it's called the Department of War.*" Obviously, that calls for resistance, and I'm sure that's going to happen in Chicago. But what does the Church bring to the game? If we can help people see that bullying is self-defeating. That picture of the three world leaders of India, China, and Russia, that's the future of the world. Trump has destroyed the American Empire, which is not an altogether bad thing. But by bullying all these other countries and cultures,

they're just like us. They're not going to put up with that. They're going to form new unions. And they can't do much worse than we've done.

So I think what Jesus is saying here first is that when we judge other people out of fear, when we turn other people into monsters, when we say every immigrant is bringing fentanyl into the country, it will inevitably hurt us. The more we demonize other people, the more afraid we're going to get. It's amazing to me that Trump has so many people in this country afraid of the most vulnerable people on the face of the Earth. What kind of cowardice is it to be afraid of immigrants? What kind of cowardice is it to be afraid of transgender families? The list goes on and on. So, the first thing I think Jesus is saying is when we judge out of fear, it's self-defeating. Our fear will only grow.

Then second, I think it is when we judge other people out of a sense of worthlessness. And make no mistake, that's the heart of the MAGA movement. Anybody that believes that hoarding wealth as opposed to sharing wealth makes you more valuable does not understand what it means to be a human being. When you put other people down so you can look better, and I'm not saying our president ever does that, (*Laughter*) but theoretically, if he did. . . Think about how hollow that would feel as a lifestyle. To have so little sense of your own worth that you think you have to put other people down so that you look good.

A lot of what we think of as patriotism is just simply hating other countries. I know people who don't believe in taking care of the people of the United States; they don't believe in taking care of the land of the United States, but they think they *love* the United States because they *hate* Mexico or whatever other country. That is *not* love, and it's self-defeating.

There's a story of narcissists. We talked about this this week in the Tuesday class. Narcissist is a mythological story of someone who falls in love with their own reflection. That's where the word narcissist comes from. It's very important to realize that narcissism is not self-love. It's concerned with the image that you have to other people. It's looking at yourself from the outside in. It's *absolutely* hollow. Which is why a narcissist can have more power than anybody else in the world, can have more money than almost anybody else in the world, and still stay up at night texting because there's somebody that doesn't like them.

Truly self-confident people don't need to brag. Truly self-confident people don't care what you think about them. They *know* that they have infinite worth. They *know* that they don't fit on any scale. So whatever judgment we have of other people poisons us. Whenever we put any worth on another human being, that scale then comes back to hurt us. So the second thing I think that Jesus is saying is when we judge other people to try to feel better than them, that hollowness cannot be cured because it's not addressing that sense. When you think your worth comes from being better than somebody else, you don't know what your true worth is. You are of *infinite* worth.

Then the last thing that I want to point out today is that for some people they judge just because the world has gotten so complicated and they just want to simplify it. Friends and enemies, boys and girls. Remember when it was so simple or we thought it was simple? The terrain wasn't really simple, but our maps were simple. At some point, that comes back to hurt us.

I was taught in school that the United States is always right, and other countries are always wrong. Good countries are the ones that support us. Evil countries are the ones that somehow want their own minerals, and they don't want us to control them. There are people who are living in their opinions right now with so little knowledge of the world. You think about the health programs of the Trump Administration. They brought back measles. They're shutting down beaches because human waste is contaminating the water. I still think we should name hurricanes after climate-denying politicians. *(Laughter)*

There's a psychological principle that I think really applies to our country right now. It's called the Dunning-Kruger effect. Maybe some of you have heard of it. It's a cognitive bias in which people with low ability in a specific area overestimate their own knowledge and competence, while those with high ability tend to underestimate theirs. This effect stems from a lack of self-awareness as incompetent individuals often lack the meta-cognitive skills necessary to recognize their own deficiencies. In other words, when your map is simple, everything is clear to you, but you don't know what you're doing. And the less you know, the more confident you may be. That explains the Trump cabinet.

But simply calling that dynamic out is not healing the wound. If the Church doesn't keep our compassion, if we don't keep our reason, if we don't keep love at the center of our message, *who will?* Who will call the human family back together and into wholeness if you and I don't?

So the third thing I think Jesus is trying to share with us is the idea that when you try to make life simple by making your map simple, you're just going to get more and more confused because the world will be more and more of a mystery to you. Please ask yourself this question. We all fall into judgment, even your beloved pastor, more than you even know. *(Laughter)* But I also know that I've never been happy when I do that. It may be happy for a little while. It feels really good at first. It's like scratching poison ivy. *(Laughter)* It feels *great* at first. But the unhappiness only grows. It only grows.

What I take from this passage is if I feel called to judgment because I'm afraid, those judgments are going to only increase my fear. If I become judgmental because I feel worthless inside, and I want to make myself seem bigger by making somebody else smaller, my sense of hollowness will only grow. Then finally, if I'm trying to make life simple of friends and enemies and good and bad, and I make my map so simple that the world is a mystery to me, my confusion will only grow.

I'm going to close with a quote. I used it a couple of weeks ago. I wish I'd saved it, but don't judge me. *(Laughter)* Eric Hoffer was an atheist, but I think sometimes atheists understand Christian principles better than the Church does. Eric Hoffer says:

The remarkable thing is that we really love our neighbor as ourselves. We do unto others as we do unto ourselves. We hate others when we hate ourselves. We are tolerant towards others when we tolerate ourselves. We forgive others when we forgive ourselves. We are prone to sacrifice others when we are ready to sacrifice ourselves.

In other words, the measure we use on others eventually is what we use on ourselves.

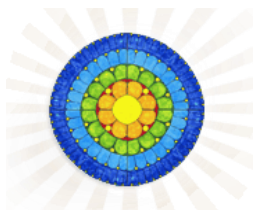
Well, that's my understanding of our passage. We'll take a moment now for you to think about how you would have preached these words.

Benediction

Rev. Carol Johnson

If we lash out, who will bring kindness into the world? May we break the cycle of fear and judgment that keeps us all bound in knots of pain. In love's many names, let us be free to love. Amen.

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