

Resist Judging

Message #4 in the series "When Someone Hurts Me"

Matthew 7:1-5; 18:21-22; James 1:19-20

St. Paul's United Methodist Church of Elizabethtown
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*"Do not judge, or you too will be judged. ² For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. ³ "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? ⁴ How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? ⁵ You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye. **Matthew 7:1-5***

Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?" Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.

Matthew 18:21-22

A few decades ago, the #1 criticism people gave when asked about Christians was 'they're always asking for money!' Not that that sentiment has totally gone away, but today, the #1 criticism people give about Christians is that 'they are so judgmental'. This is sadly ironic, because Christians are called to proclaim **good news** of forgiveness and hope; but most outsiders view Christians as bearers of **bad news**....as being unwelcome 'moral police' standing in judgment, wagging their index fingers and saying 'no, no, no' to bad behaviors prevalent in our culture.

Now, there are many different issues involved in how Christians are viewed today - and many changes in our culture that have taken place that have contributed to that view. But what we are concerned with in this message is judgmentalism that occurs in personal conflict. And, in this case, 'judgmentalism' is a behavior that we have all engaged in at some point or another. You see, it's easy for us to point our fingers at judgmental, self-righteous Christian groups.....and judge them (catch the irony?!). But **it's not so easy to admit our own propensity for this ugly attitude within our own hearts. But Jesus loves us too much to allow us to avoid it and sidestep the issue.**

Our present series is called 'Beyond Hurt' and we're looking at biblical teaching on handling conflict which occurs 'when someone hurts me.' You see, Jesus is a realist: he speaks of conflict as something to expect, not just as a hypothetical possibility. In Matthew 18 he details how to handle relational conflict when it

arises. Over the past few weeks, we've surveyed Jesus' teaching on what to do when someone hurts you. We've looked at:

- pursuing reconciliation
- setting boundaries
- extending forgiveness. And, today we look at
- resisting judging

In many churches, Matthew 18 is considered the 'church discipline' chapter. The second half of the chapter is taken up with Jesus teaching a procedure to follow when handling conflicts in our relationships. Jesus' very straightforward and practical steps call us to first address the person privately, individually, aiming at agreement and reconciliation. If that reaches an impasse, only then are you are to try step two where you bring others with you to address the situation and attempt to effect reconciliation. Only after that fails is church discipline to be applied. After this teaching, Peter asks the practical question of how often we are to offer forgiveness. Jesus answers Peter's question with the parable of the unforgiving servant. We are familiar with the story of

- a king conducting an audit of his outstanding debts
- upon finding a servant that owes an enormous amount (this would be the equivalent to 200,000 times one's normal yearly earnings, roughly 3.5 billion dollars today, an enormous, unpayable amount!) he consigns him and his family to slavery whereby he might begin to pay off his debt
- the servant falls in a heap before the master, pleading for leniency, for just some more time to make a dent in the loan
- the king is moved to pity, not only granting his request but out of pity **erasing the entire debt!**
- However, when that same, newly solvent servant does his own audit he demands payment of his servant – a much smaller amount (*a hundred denarii*, which would be the equivalent of 1/3 of a yearly salary) and in a much rougher, more violent, more forceful way ("*seizing him, he began to choke him*")
- This servant, in words reminiscent of the previous servant before the king, asks for leniency, for just some more time to make a dent in the loan
- However, he is denied and sold into slavery along with his family.
- When this pitiless story is reported to the forgiving, pitying king - the unforgiving servant is called out by the king. His forgiveness is undone.

Jesus concludes that heaven operates on that same principle. Forgiven people forgive.

The problem we will look at has to do with the response of the unforgiving servant – who has a problem with judging his underling mercifully, as he himself had been treated.

DO NOT JUDGE

This parable illustrates pursuing reconciliation, setting boundaries, and extending forgiveness and it illustrates what is involved in judging correctly, which we turn to today. Earlier in this gospel, Jesus addressed the issue directly –

*"Do not judge, or you too will be judged. ² For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. ³ "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? ⁴ How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? ⁵ You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye. **Matthew 7:1-5***

Here's another shift that has happened in our time: **John 3:16** used to be the most often quoted Bible verse, not only in print but even on placards at football games! However, that has now been overtaken by **Matthew 7:1**, *"Do not judge."* However, I do think you'll see that this verse is misunderstood and misapplied today due to three factors: our cultural shift toward moral relativity, a redefining of the term, 'tolerance,' and a sentimentalizing of the command to love.

Moral relativism is the idea that there are no absolute rules to determine whether something is right or wrong. Although determining right and wrong can be a complicated affair, Christianity assumes a Creator God who made all things and who alone attributes final determination of right and wrong to all he has made. The logic is simple. When you buy a new appliance like a dishwasher, you are given an Owner's Manual which describes how the appliance works and operating instructions. For the appliance to work properly, it must be used according to the maker's instructions. The same is true of human beings: since we are created by a Creator, he defines for us how we function properly. We're not free to make up our own rules of operation and expect us to 'work' properly disregarding his intentions for us or his prescriptions for proper functioning!

However, we live in an age where faith in a Supreme Being has waned and therefore, the agreement on a fixed moral order has also become less honored. Without a divinely ordained and established moral order, those who assume such an order are often viewed as 'judgmental' since they are making assumptions about the world that are not shared by others who see human autonomy and freedom as higher truths. I have two teenagers, so, I know that many times my explanations and rationale for certain expected behaviors are like a foreign language because they live in a radically different thought-world. They of course attribute it to me being old-fashioned and uncool, but (besides that), our disconnect rests on underlying worldview assumptions.

In this atmosphere, the term 'tolerance' has morphed in meaning and usage. It used to be understood as graciously enduring those who you disagree with. Tolerance meant respectfully agreeing to disagree. Although you might not see eye to eye, with someone else, you still respected each other's right to hold your own, differing opinion. Today, "tolerance" has been reconstructed to mean something entirely different. Essentially it now means that all ideas, lifestyles and truth claims, must be deemed equally valid. It is now considered intolerant and downright arrogant to think your opinion is right and someone else's is wrong. Whereas before toleration assumed you considered yourself right, now it's seen as

judgmental to consider someone else wrong. Now, not only must you respect my contrary opinion, but I must agree that your opinion is just as true, just as valid and just as valuable a view even if it is diametrically opposed to my own! That is a radical redefinition.

Mixing moral relativism with the new understanding of toleration results in a reaction against anyone who takes a strong stance on **any** issue. Sure, there can be an arrogant tone of authoritarianism that makes strong opinions repulsive and distasteful. That we all reject. But, today, in our society, often simply disagreeing with someone is now viewed as deserving of the correction, "*Thou shalt not judge.*"

We would all agree whereas judgmentalism is to be avoided (and we'll define that in a moment), judging in the form of discernment is implied (and necessary) in the passage we just read.

The teaching by Jesus "to avoid judging" is not intended to end discernment and discrimination, it is intended to avoid hypocrisy. The point was never that we should not make moral judgments or discuss what's "right" or "wrong." Jesus' teaching is aimed at avoiding a "double-standard." We should not judge others by one standard that we would not want to be judged with ourselves. This is how we avoid "judgmentalism" and fault-finding. We are to correct our own short-comings before helping others correct their own.

Jesus' hyperbolic preaching borders on the hilarious when someone with a two-by-four obscuring their vision is making a fuss over the microscopic particle of sawdust in the eye of the person they are correcting. Focus on correcting your own vision before your attempt to correct someone else's. You should always be more aware of your own mistakes, weaknesses, failures and foibles; this in turn, softens your approach, 'tenderizing' the care you offer in helping another with theirs. The quote that helped me the most in my own marriage was,

**Before you bring attention to someone else's trash,
lift the lid to your own garbage can.**

When I learned to begin discussions with my wife, "Honey, you know that I'm not very good at _____" (I can use this introductory phrase to introduce hundreds of weaknesses) she engaged on a much less defensive fashion than when I used to insensitively raise my voice to point out what I saw as a fault in her!

The same principle works in all of ministry: people open up when we come alongside them as fellow journeymen instead of as 'Bible answer men' who can give proof texts that address 'their' problems.

There are many sources that feed our judgmentalism. When someone hurts us, before we know it we can react instinctively, emotionally, and defensively. I choose these words intentionally: we react (not reflectively or thought-through, but prompted by the offense). Our reactions are often instinctive, emotional and

defensive – all words laden with strong emotions which tend to distort our best thoughts. Here are a few of the most common emotional distortions that occur. I am all too well acquainted with them. Do you recognize any of these in yourself?

SEEDS OF JUDGMENTALISM

First, James, that most blunt and practical of New Testament writers offers this helpful advice:

*My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry ²⁰ because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires. **James 1:19-20***

And, Jesus points to the source of our issues as not being prompted by outside circumstances but from our inner natures, our hearts.

*²¹ For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, ²² coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. ²³ All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.” **Mark 7:21-23***

COMMON COGNITIVE EMOTIVE DISTORTIONS

- **Insular thinking** – based on our own understanding and experience, we judge the person’s behavior on what I would have done (‘I’ always equaling me at my best)
- **Snap Judgments** – what we refer to as rush-to-judgments, going with our first assessments, pinning blame early amidst the difficulty
- **All-or-Nothing Thinking** – here is where we think in terms of Win-or-loss, black-and-white with little wiggle room or gray area considered
- **Personal Flaw vs. Situational Awareness** – when we judge a person’s heart or motive and attribute the hurt to a character flaw rather than considering any contributing factors like, a cranky child, a loss of sleep, or previous hurts experienced by the perpetrator who hurt to me

I simply list these as possible seed-beds for angry, judgmental reactions. They are ones that I find commonly in my own heart – and my main purpose in listing them here is to say that the state of our hearts often give in to judging those who hurt us **because they’re programmed and primed to do just that.** When we in fact judge others, or their motives.... we are giving vent to these hair-trigger responses.....and that is not what Jesus prescribes....

SEEING WITH NEW EYES

Have you seen those family vignettes (featured on the news) that show children born with sight-obscuring conditions seeing for the first time after receiving special corrective lenses? One such case is that of Leo, who at four-months due to a rare vision ailment had never had a clear vision of the world; all he could see was either fuzzy or completely out-of-focus. Even up-close objects or people were

indecipherable.... he could not distinguish between grandparents nor parents. However, specially prepared corrective lenses were made to fix that situation. The family captured in a video the first time his glasses were in place and he saw his mother's face. Across his face spread a broad, wide, happy smile. Seeing clearly made all the difference in the world.

Jesus provides Peter (and us) with a whole new view of ourselves which enables us to see ourselves and others in a whole new light.

Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?" Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.

Matthew 18:21-22

When Jesus encourages forgiveness the apostle Peter asks to what extent is he expecting forgiveness to go. He offers what I consider a rather generous range, "Shall we forgive up to seven times?" Quite frankly, I would have proposed 3 times and felt that I was being quite generous forgiving.

Jesus' response and the following parable about the master who forgives the servant's enormous debt opens Peter's eyes to a whole new perspective about forgiveness. You see, Peter's proposal for forgiveness is based upon Peter seeing himself as the dispenser of forgiveness, which he can regulate and control.

Jesus' answer explodes Peter's categories and assumptions. Jesus says in effect that there are no limits to forgiveness because he is not to see himself as the dispenser of forgiveness but first and foremost as a recipient of forgiveness and then, and only then, as a conduit dispensing that forgiveness to others.

**We forgive because we have been forgiven.
We are recipients of grace first
which makes us dispensers of grace.**

We are first and foremost forgiven of a huge debt by God's grace which came by the cost of Christ's death. From that status as being gratefully forgiven by God's amazing grace, we are to extend forgiveness to those who sin against us.

Our eyes are opened to a whole new way to view ourselves and others. Judging others fades in significance when we realize how we are forgiven by the amazing grace, the slow-to-anger, the abounding compassion of God ourselves. We're prompted to pass it on. When we forget this, that's when we slip from being the forgiven-forgiving people God intends us to be.