

Learning to Live Without Judgement

October 2, 2022 Sermon by Stephen Portner

Matthew 7:1-12

7:1 *"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.*

⁶ *"Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces.*

⁷ *"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. ⁸ For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.*

⁹ *"Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? ¹⁰ Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? ¹¹ If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him! ¹² So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.*

Before we get too far we need to make a distinction between judgement and assessment. "Assessing other's behavior is a necessary part of life. Good parents pay attention to their children's behavior and are responsible for correcting it when necessary."¹ Teachers, when they give grades on papers, are using assessment. Someone who is mentoring someone, on playing piano, learning to ice skate, learning an exercise regiment, are all based on assessment. Assessing someone is not the same as judgement. "Judging is making a negative evaluation of others without standing in solidarity with them. When we judge others we are criticizing them, but not as a caring

¹ James Bryan Smith, The Good and Beautiful Life.

friend [or mentor] who wants to help.”² Judging, as Jesus uses it here in the Sermon on the Mount, is more akin to condemnation.

There is not one of us who like to be judged in a condemnatory manner. We can all recall a time or two when that has happened to us, and we did not appreciate it at all. Not only that, but most of the time the judgement does not lead to any better behavior but usually does lead to bitter resentment toward the person doing the judging. “Correcting someone can be a healthy, even life-enhancing action. Judging others never is.”³

There are two primary reasons we judge others: to fix people or to make us feel better about ourselves. (These two often occur at the same time.) Though we may say we have good intentions, when we judge others we demonstrate that we care more about ourselves than the person we are judging. If we really cared, we would adopt another approach.⁴

Although judging others produce results in some cases, there are four reasons it fails more often than not:

- 1) It doesn't show a heart of love. The judging person doesn't demonstrate love toward the other. Mother Teresa famously said, “If you judge people, you have no time to love them.” This is why people don't tolerate judgment. They instinctively know that they are not being loved. If we dive bomb others with our accusatory words and then pull up and fly on, leaving them all alone, they know they have not been loved.
- 2) Second, judging someone, even if we are right, takes a shortcut that bypasses a necessary step. When someone is in error, the first step toward change is for the person to admit or recognize that there is a problem. When we judge others, we are forcing them to recognize their errors. Again, this sometimes works (e.g., extreme cases of intervention). But in most human interactions this is not received well. Those being judged feel attacked. And the natural reaction is to become defensive and strike back.
- 3) Third, judgment is deconstruction without reconstruction. We tear down the house, but we fail to rebuild it. The people we are judging live as they do for many reasons, and they are at the mercy of many dominant narratives. [Condemning others often] fails because it doesn't factor in that a key ingredient for change is knowing *how* to change. Change involves adopting new narratives,

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

spiritual disciplines, community and the help of God. The process of change is lengthy and challenging, and will usually involve the help of others.

- 4) Fourth, our judgment may be (and often is) wrong. The old saying contains a great truth: "Do not judge another until you have walked a mile in their shoes." Our knowledge of another person's plight is limited. We don't know how they feel, what has happened to them in the past or what struggles they face.⁵

There's usually a story behind why people act the way they do. I have made misjudgments before because I thought someone acted a certain way because they were trying to be difficult, when really the reason was that they had misunderstood or were dealing with something unforeseen of their own.

The second reason we are prone to judge others is because it makes us feel better about ourselves. If we don't feel good about ourself, one way to feel better is to knock someone else down. When we judge others, we feel superior to them.⁶

Jesus uses the metaphor of a measuring cup. We will receive in equal measure of the amount we judge others. In other words, if you judge another person, expect to be judged in return. Jesus then uses the comical image of one person trying to point out the speck in someone else's eye when they have a log in their own eye. In our judgment of others, we fail to see we too stand in need of judgement. It is not uncommon for someone to be especially judgmental of someone else for something that one does or used to do for their own self.

Jesus then uses an analogy of not giving something holy to dogs or casting pearls before swine. To say that means we shouldn't give something worthwhile to people who are not worthy to receive it misses the point, and sounds terribly judgmental, especially when Jesus said that we are not to judge others. What Jesus is referring to is giving something to someone else they can't use. You don't give something holy to dogs. They have no use for it. You don't give jewels to pigs. They have no use for it. Condemning others for the sake of getting them to improve is as useless as giving something holy to dogs or casting pearls before swine. The person has no use for it. In fact, it is more likely to harm the relationship you have with that person you are judging.

So, when someone is doing something we disagree with, and we know we shouldn't judge them, then what should we do? Jesus recommends that we ask, seek, and knock. Is someone doing something you don't like? Pray for them. "When we pray for someone our hearts shift to the person's well-being; it's impossible not to begin to feel

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

compassion for him or her. Prayer also helps us to accurately assess another's situation."⁷ We invite God and his wisdom to be involved in the situation, and thus, we are not trying to figure out why someone is acting the way they do on our own.

Seeking and knocking are words of persistence. We need to be persistent in our prayers, and we need to communicate with that person that you are standing with them. Judging others is more like standing at a distance and lobbing grenades. Praying for someone means you are walking beside them when petitioning God. Change comes slowly, and the prayers we offer could very well extend over a period of time.

Jesus' words that come at the end of this Scripture reading have often been referred to as the Golden Rule. Jesus' word is for us to treat others in the same manner we would like to be treated. Just as we would rather have someone pray for us and stand along beside us, rather than judge us, so we should do onto others the same.

Judging others is tempting, but it never succeeds long term. The far better approach is to pray for and stand with those we care about. In short, we treat them as we want to be treated. No other teacher in history can surpass the brilliance of Jesus.⁸

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.