

Sermon – 27/03/2011 am

Do Not Judge

Study Text: Luke 6:37-42

The children were playing a game with a ball. They were taking turns at who would throw the ball – or were supposed to be taking turns. Girl A told girl B to give the ball to the little girl C because it was her turn; but there was no response. A few minutes later girl A got the ball herself. It was the little girls turn again but to my amazement girl A did not give her the ball but threw it herself. She refused to do the very thing she had told the other girl to do moments before. The rules it appeared were different now that she had the ball. Why was I amazed? We all tend to have one set of rules for ourselves and a different set for others.

1. Irresistible

From a very young age we become acutely aware of what is fair. One of the first words a child learns is No! One of the first phrases they learn is ‘it’s not fair’. If they see their friend getting a bigger piece of cake they complain – ‘it’s not fair, he’s got a bigger piece than me’. Every child has a sense of justice. The trouble is this sense of justice is warped. It is warped by the child’s own view of themselves; or more bluntly put, by the child’s sin. Their sense of justice is not so acute when **they** get the biggest piece of cake.

We talk about children not because this behaviour is only seen in children. It starts when we are young and continues all the days of our life. Jesus was not just speaking to children when he said ‘do not judge and do not condemn’ (7:37). The propensity to judge others, and condemn others, seems to be irresistible.

Jesus would soon see his carefully chosen disciples in judgment mode. On more than one occasion they got into an argument about who was the greatest. One of them saw the other getting more than he was in terms of advancement in the group. James and John, men who were in the inner circle were quick to judge. When the Samaritans did not accept them they immediately judged them. They wanted to call down fire from heaven in judgement upon these villagers.

In Romans chapter 2 Paul speaks about the judgment of God. The Jews had the written law and would be judged according to this law. But what about those who did not have the law? The apostle reminds such people of how they are always ready to judge others. *Whoever you are who judge others* (Romans 2:1). Every human being is like this. We all make judgments about other people, even if we do not voice those judgments. In our minds we condemn others, especially for things they have done to us.

We might make our judgment known to others – in what is called gossip. ‘Do you know what so and so did to me the other day?’ On occasions we actually tell the person directly what wrong they have done. Depending on our attitude, and our readiness to forgive, this may or may not result in reconciliation.

Do not judge. Do not condemn. This is what Jesus preached. We have just come through an election campaign. One of the tactics used in campaigning is to malign the other party. They call it digging up dirt and throwing it at the other person. Politicians resort to the tactic of personally condemning their opponent. It is a tactic sometimes seen in the church. Sadly it is a tactic we are all tempted to

use from time to time. We are quick to find fault and quick to condemn, whereas we should be slow to do such things. Do not judge but forgive one another – as you have been forgiven by Jesus.

Forgive and you will be forgiven does not mean that we can earn forgiveness from God. It means that we are open to receive the grace of God. If we do not forgive we are not open to his grace.

In saying *do not judge* Jesus was speaking to individuals about personal relationships. He was not ruling out a place for discipline within the church or in society. Evildoers must be brought to justice in courts established for judgment. It is not for the individual to judge his neighbour. We do not like being judged so let us refrain from judging others. Do to others as you would have them do to you.

In one church there was a man who went around telling everyone the wrong they had done. I was not told of the measure that he used for judging – we will come to the matter of measures shortly. This story is interesting because what happened was that one day someone took this man aside and told him of wrong things he had done. The man was deeply offended and never came back to that church. He probably went to another church to continue in his judgmental attitude.

2. Impossible

For sinful, self-centred hearts judging others is not only irresistible, it is also impossible – impossible to judge justly that is. Jesus used a short parable and a somewhat longer metaphor to make this point. Why is it impossible for us to judge justly in personal relationships? Because we are not omniscient or all knowing. We do not have all the necessary information. It is often said that we have only heard one side of story.

We never have all the information necessary for totally just judgments. We cannot look into people's hearts. Our judgment will always be clouded by this human inadequacy. We cannot see clearly. *Can the blind lead the blind?* said Jesus (6:39). A disciple is not above his teacher. The best of human teachers are still imperfect. Some people think their politician will somehow save them but they are people just like us. Some people think their minister can somehow save them but they are people just like us.

Jesus was probably referring to the Pharisees when he spoke about the blind leading the blind. These learned religious leaders were influential and powerful, not only in teaching the law but also in making judgments.

One day they caught a woman in the act of adultery. They dragged her off to Jesus saying she must be condemned and stoned. 'Judge her' they demanded. Jesus said *let he who is without sin cast the first stone* (John 8:7). They were all condemned by Jesus. He knew their hearts and their evil motives. Jesus also knew the heart of the woman. With Jesus, mercy triumphs over judgment.

The Pharisees were blind guides. Those who followed them and their teaching would come to grief along with them (6:39). Judgment without mercy will be shown to those who show no mercy themselves (James 2:13). A judgmental attitude is the opposite of a gracious and loving attitude. We must take Jesus as our teacher and learn that mercy triumphs over judgment.

Sinful human hearts not only lack knowledge; they are also biased. It is impossible for us to judge impartially at the personal level. We may think that as believers we can be impartial, but is this true?

On the entrance exam for the police force is the question 'what will you do when you pull a speeding driver over and find that it is your brother driving?' 'I will book him like any other driver'

the young recruit said. No. That was not the correct answer. He was told he must immediately call another officer to come and deal with the case. This sounds extreme. You will say 'but I can be impartial'. But can you really? My children often complained that their Sunday school teacher was particularly harsh with them. Their mother, who was the teacher, said she was just trying to avoid being partial.

The speck in your brother's eye and the log in your own eye is a widely known saying of Jesus. Widely heard but not so widely heeded. We never have difficulty seeing the faults of others, but when it comes to our own faults we suddenly become blind. When we judge others we are hypocrites because of this blindness. 'Firstly remove the log from your own eye' said Jesus 'so you will be able to see the tiny speck in your brothers eye' (6:42).

In other places this wisdom is spoken of in terms of looking into a mirror. A man observes his face in a mirror then promptly forgets what he saw. This is how James describes a person who hears the word but fails to do what they hear. Without a mirror we cannot see our own face. But we can see others and we are ready to make judgments on how others look.

'Look into the mirror' Jesus might have said. See the log in your own eye and do something about it before you start looking at others and condemning some small thing they have said or done. The mirror we need is the word of God. As we look into the Bible our sins will be revealed to us by the Word and the Spirit. We will be reminded that God looks on the heart and judges the secrets of all men by Christ Jesus (Romans 2:16).

3. Inviting

Judge not and you shall not be judged (6:37 cf. Matthew 7:1). Judging others is not without consequences. In judging others you are inviting judgment upon yourself. What particular judgment was Jesus referring to in this statement? Was it in the present or in the future – the Day of Judgment? It is of course a principle that operates in the present, but the warning of divine judgment is certainly included.

We referred to Romans chapter 2 where Paul writes 'do you think you will escape the judgment of God?' to those who judged others and did the same things themselves – which is what everyone does. When we judge others for their faults and yet do the same things ourselves we leave ourselves open the charge of hypocrisy and to condemnation. We will be condemned by other people, and more importantly by God.

The measure you use on others will be the same measure used on you (7:38). With this solemn warning in mind you will be wise to forgive rather than condemn. This is what Jesus says. *Give and it will be given to you, a good measure pressed down, shaken together and running over* (7:38). The picture is that of grain being poured most generously into a measuring cup.

These words seem to take us away from the subject of judging others, but the principle is the same. When you give it will be given to you, measure for measure – and even more when God is the giver. And it is God who is the giver of all good things, as well as the judge of all men.

Looking to James once again we are told 'who are you to judge another (James 4:12). God is the one and only lawgiver and judge. Judgment is his business. Beware of doing God's work for him; he will not be impressed.

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