

“JUDGING WITH CLEAR VISION”
A Sermon Preached at
FIRST UNITED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
Belleville, IL
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(transcribed from audio file)

Our scripture reading this morning is from the New Testament, from Matthew 7:1-5. Let us open our hearts to what the scripture and our Lord are saying to us this morning.

“Do not judge, so that you may not be judged. For the judgment you give will be the judgment you get, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. Why do you see the speck in your neighbor’s eye but do not notice the log in your own eye? Or how can you say to your neighbor, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ while the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor’s eye.

NRSVue

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

I got new glasses this week, so....they look about the same as the ones I had before. Just a slight change in the prescription. I never know when to get new glasses. The first eye doctor I got when I moved back here to the area was entirely not helpful. We’d go through the whole exam. He’d do that thing where he’d go like, “Okay. One or two? One or two? Okay. Two or three?” Right? You know this. Right? Or then they’d switch it up on you. “A or B?”

“Whoa. Now we’re doing letters. Okay,”

And then at the end of it this is what he would do. At the end he would go, “Okay so, there is a slight change in your prescription” and I would say, “So, should I get new glasses?” And he would go, “Do you want new glasses?”

That’s why I came to you. You’re the doctor! “Should I get new glasses?”

“Do you want new glasses?”

And I said, “Well, I can see a little better with that other lens.”

And he goes, “Do you want to see better?”

So, now I got a new eye doctor, and we started to play the game where she said, “So, do you want to get new glasses?”

And I said, “I don’t know. Do you think I should get new glasses?”

And I was ready for her but instead she went, “Yeah. I’d probably do it.”

That’s all I needed. I need a person with a degree that matches the checking of eyes to tell me what to do for my well-being. I know I can resist but I’d love an opinion, and I finally got it. And now I have these glasses, and I have to tell you, when I got them and put them on it was kinda like, “Oh hey there. Okay.”

I mean, the primary purpose of getting new glasses is so you can see better and I could. I mean I didn’t realize all the little micro abrasions that were on the front of my old glasses so things were just a little foggy, but I didn’t notice that before. And there is a slight difference in the prescription for things that are farther away, so there is some hope that I will be able to see the clock on the back wall when I’m doing my sermon. But that’s clearer now than it was before and I didn’t realize that.

Also, not just the main purpose of seeing better, but also the fit. You know, when I tilt my head, the glasses don’t slide down, like they’re on there and I didn’t realize over time how much my glasses had become gradually looser and then when I took my old glasses and looked at them with the new glasses, I went, “ooh, dang they’re a little beat up lookin’.” There are like worn parts on it and scratches. I never noticed those before, mainly when I look at my glasses, I have to look at them without glasses. “They look great!” Kinda the way I look at myself in the mirror – look younger, Rob. (Puts glasses back on) “Oh no. Maybe not.”

It’s hard to tell. You don’t realize how much you’ve drifted a bit and I think the same thing comes with our whole attitude towards this judgment thing. This is tough teaching coming from the gospel of Matthew but that’s not a new thing. In the gospel of Matthew, you get all kinds of hard teachings from Jesus, and the main thing is it’s trying to point you toward, yeah, you’re going to need some help with this. You’re going to need some help from God on this.

But in this particular teaching Jesus is coming after us for our attitude on judging others. Now I want to be clear like, NO! You are not supposed to judge other people, but you are supposed to judge what is right and wrong. It has a purpose in helping us correct one another, correct ourselves, move down good paths, follow God's will, but judging people – no. But judging actions and judging what should be done – yes. Absolutely. I mean, have you looked at your Bible? It's filled with a lot of advice on what is right and what is wrong and solid teachings on that. So, we are meant to discern right from wrong. So, Jesus gives the teaching here and to be honest we don't have a really good track record as Christians when it comes to judging.

We get ourselves in trouble an awful lot. Part of it is a lot like the glasses. The main purpose of the glasses is so I can see clearly. The main purpose of judging is not so that you can point a finger at someone. The main purpose of judging is not so you can clearly say, "Well, that person's wrong. Look at that messed up stuff over there."

And yet when you listen to us judge other people, it does seem like that's the goal we're going for. We're going to clearly point out who's messed up and it never seems to be me. How about that?

The other thing, much like the glasses, it's not just that main purpose, but it's also the fit. How do we fit our judging? Oh, we fit it according to us. In some ways when we look at judging others, we do it under the lens of ourselves rather than the lens of God or God's Word. We look at other people and it's funny how it works both ways. Sometimes when you feel that you are doing well at something then you specifically judge other people for it. You've managed to maybe get a handle on this one aspect of your life and so when you see someone else doing it, oh, then the full judgment. Well, they just tried harder. Oh, they can handle that. They wouldn't have to. They wouldn't make those mistakes.

But the funny thing is, is that sometimes it's the very thing that you're terrible at that you judge other people harshly on. And I think what it is, is it's kinda like, let's take something a little minor like you're often late. Okay? But you're just a little bit late, but that person who is like 10-15 minutes late, oh you've got all the words about them. That very thing that you see in yourself, that very thing you're working on, and I don't know sometimes it's because we're already working so hard on it. The idea that they don't seem to be working on it is gut-wrenching to us for some reason. Or maybe it's just like well, I'm not as bad as they are so let me point out to the world how bad they are. We use ourselves as the measure of what's the right fit and it's never how we were intended to be and that's not how we're taught through our scripture.

You know, one of the things with getting new glasses, you want them to look good. When you gotta get new glasses, they might as well look good and when it comes to judging, ooh, we like to do that judging that makes us look good. You know? You ever get together with a group of friends and seems like every time you sit together, it's just everybody judging other people. It's like it's a giant judge fest. It's just like when people get together, what should we talk about. "Let's talk about other things that are bad."

Wouldn't it be amazing if we turned the same powers of perception on ourself? Can you imagine getting together with a group of friends and instead of just complaining about the world and complaining about other people, that all of a sudden people started saying, "You know I think I could work on my honesty a bit more."

Then someone else says, "Yeah, you know, and lately I've noticed that I'm a little racist."

That doesn't quite happen too often, does it? Did you ever see a group of friends get together and each person starts to self-reflect and talk about where their shortcomings are and what they need to work on? No. We get together and we just point out at the world because we're going to make sure that our judging makes us look good. And Jesus knows this about us and that's why in this passage it says, yeah, don't judge others lest you get judged the same way.

And quite frankly, each and everyone of you just asked for it. In the Lord's Prayer, forgive us our debts just as we forgive our debtors. Lord God, the exact way that I forgive and give grace to other people, I want you to treat me the same way. What the heck were you thinking when you said that? Do you know how messed over each and every one of you are right now?

God's like, "Okay. Here we go."

So, Jesus says, "Okay. Okay. Here we go. If we're going to get into judging, start with yourself. Start with the log that is in your own eye."

Now, keep this in mind, our God is not inviting us into a self-deprecating exercise where we tear ourselves to shreds because the main purpose of judging is not to point out what is awful. It is not to rip someone to shreds. That was the mistake we made with other people. The main purpose of judging is to bring about reconciliation, renewal, healing. To take what is broken and mend it. To take what is sick and heal it. To take what we need to work on and get better at it.

Judgment is not for the sake of condemnation. The judgment is for renewal. So, don't do that to yourself. Don't rip yourself apart with this self-examination but be honest with yourself. Really see where you have stuff to work on. And with confidence I can look at each and every one of you and look in the mirror and say the words, you got stuff you need to work on. But don't let that tear you down. Instead hear that for the main purpose it has, so that you can see it clearly and be healed and be renewed because that's the life you were intended to have in the faith.

With our glasses it's important to have a good fit and it's important with our judging of ourselves that we have a good fit; that we do not let the abusive words of maybe a relative or a friend or some teacher from your past or some bully from long ago or just yesterday, we don't fit our judgment of ourselves according to them, we fit our judgment of ourselves against the Word of God, against what we know we are to be through what we're taught about the faith. That's what we use. We do not let other people make the measure of how we're doing.

The fit is our fit to the faith that we claim. And yeah, we want to look good. We want to look good, but maybe instead of being so focused on looking good, it's looking for where we can do good. Looking for what we can do in our own renewal. It is going to be God alone who brings about a full renewal of us. A renewing of our spirit, a healing happens because of faith. And what we are to look for is the good that we can do in that. What is it that we can contribute to that? God works with our will and gives us opportunities to participate in our own healing.

That's how we're supposed to take at that log that's in our own eye. Not to tear ourselves down, but to look for an opportunity for renewal. Not to fit the expectations of people around us in this world, but to fit what God is calling us into. And not to look good, but to see where we can do good in our own reforming, in our own building up, in our own maturing. And so then, let us judge others the way God calls us to judge ourselves.

Let's look at those out there who seem to be doing wrong, who are participating in injustice, who are hurting others, and instead of looking simply to label and tear down, but instead to seek to point out what is right and what is wrong so that healing can happen, so that justice can happen. Those things that get your blood boiling, those people that you have felt real condemnation for this week, those irritants that have been upon you, have you spent as much energy as you have identifying it, talking about it, dwelling on it, as you have prayed for their healing?

Have you taken those who are participating in such wrongs and earnestly prayed not for them to die quietly, not for them to somehow disappear, but instead to earnestly pray for that person's healing because if that kind of brokenness and that kind of injustice and that kind of just horribleness is flowing out of them, there is some healing that is needed there. That is a teaching that is really hard to take into your heart. It's so much nicer just to say, "That person's a jerk! That person is trash!" But we don't get to discount what God has made and no person is trash.

As painful as it is somewhere in our seeking of what is right and wrong, we have to remember the main purpose. The main purpose of judgment is to bring about reconciliation, healing, correction, and goodness. And that's hard. And just as we fit this to God's way, we have to make sure we are not letting our own biases run our anger, run our judgment, but instead that we're truly looking at the world with God's eyes.

Understanding how we've been forgiven and how we've been loved and then looking at those problems out there and seeking how we can be part of what is good. What's the good that I can do in this situation? I'm not just going to complain about things and label things so that I look good, but I'm going to look for the good that I can participate in because the goal that we're going for here is reconciliation, renewal, blessing. That's what we're going for.

And so, Jesus is saying to us in this scripture, you be careful how you judge others cause you wouldn't want God to judge you that way. Jesus is reminding us that the way we act towards one another should be guided by the way God acts towards us.

So, thanks be to God that you are received with an expectation of renewal and that God seeks reconciliation and healing for you. How can that be our focus? And don't get me wrong I'm not living in this Polyanna world that just says, "Look, if you all would just pray three times, all the bad people would behave." But do you ever pray for the bad people? Do you ever pray for healing in their hearts? Do you ever see where you can participate in what would be more like healing and less like blaming?

There is a need for accountability. There's a need for judgment, but it all serves the great purpose of reconciliation. And this is hard, but if we're not careful, we're just gonna slide off into the point where we're not seeing things as clearly anymore, and there won't be anyone to pull us back, and we won't be participating in healing and reconciliation. We're just going to participate in our own flavor of the ugly.

Let's have the kind of vision that God intends us to have and let our judgment be part of some healing in this world. And may God be glorified by this and all that we seek to do.

Halleluiah and Amen.