

MOUNTAIN VIEWS - JUDGING
A SERMON BASED ON MATTHEW 7:1-6
PREACHED AT CHIPPAWA PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
NIAGARA FALLS, ONTARIO
SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 11, 2018
10:00 a.m.

Jesus words from today are used liberally in our culture.

We readily, willingly and eagerly

use these words from Jesus as the authorization

for calling others out saying, 'Who are you to judge me?'

Of calling others out saying, 'You are in no position to judge.'

'You have no right to judge.'

Yet we live in the irony that despite this belief that no one should judge

and no one has the right to judge,

our world is more openly judgemental than ever.

We live in the time where we have seen

the emergence of the social media mob mentality

where there are pile on's

of anonymous, negative and collective hate.

Where deep and careful consideration, nuance, context

where getting further information, respectful conversation are seen

as being support for the other side.

We say, don't judge.

But we immediately draw conclusions and make assessments
about others intelligence, discernment, motives
and character.

And what's worse, is we think we are good at it.

We live with the belief

that we are an accurate judge of character, motive and heart of others.

We live thinking that we can see clearly

through the appearances others present to us,

We think, with a touch of arrogance,

that we are pretty good at sizing other people up.

John was late leaving the meeting that night.

The weather was foul.

Rain and a heavy wind meant the road was hard to see,

the wipers had a difficult time clearing the water.

It was the kind of night that made a person wish they had stayed in.

Which was why,

when John saw the young man walking along the side of the road,
with his arm out and his thumb extended,
he felt a impulsive surge of compassion,
and against all his usual instincts,
pulled his car over and picked up the hitchhiker.

But after a few minutes on the road again,

sitting in uncomfortable silence with this quiet stranger,
after the impulsive surge of compassion had passed,
John's usual instincts returned.

He realized he didn't have a clue
who was riding in the car with him.

The guy could be dangerous.

He could have a gun hidden under his coat.

John recalled those signs he had seen in the neighbouring county,

correctional facility in area,

do not pick up hitchhikers.

This guy could be a thief.

John thought to himself, 'I should check for my wallet.'

He discretely felt for the pocket of his jacket.

He had taken his jacket off

and it was laying open against the back of the driver's seat.

The pocket where he kept his wallet

was positioned right in between the two front seats.

He gently laid his hand down on it.

His wallet wasn't there!

His heart pounding, the heat flushing into his face,

knowing he shouldn't have been so rash,

as to pick up a hitchhiker,

he slammed on the brakes,

pulled over to the side of the road,

and with the anger, energy and menace of one

who is frightened and cornered,

he leaned in toward the hitchhiker

and ordered him to get out of his car,

but first, 'hand over the wallet'.

The hitchhiker, scared, handed over a billfold, and got out quickly.

Arriving home shaken,

but nevertheless proud of having stood up for himself

John started to tell his wife about the experience.

She interrupted him.

Before I forget to tell you John,

I put your wallet on the piano.

You left it in your other pants when you changed to go out.

What was it you were going to tell me?

We think that we are pretty good at sizing other people up.

We think we can see clearly.

We watch a colleague at work,

lash out with words that crack like a whip,

keeping everyone well back,

and we think we can see clearly,

we think we know,

he's insecure, or he's power hungry or he's just an

We watch a family member reach for another drink,
a drink too many, a time too many
and think we know,
that they must not care,
about work, about family, about themselves,
or they'd stop.

We watch others and think we've got others figured out.
That we can figure others out. Size them up.
She's greedy.

He's difficult.

He's weak-willed.

Jesus said, do not judge.

Your vision isn't that great.

You've got a plank in your eye.

You can't see the speck in someone else's eye.

You've got a plank in your eye.

You can't see clearly.

So don't be sizing other people up.

Don't be measuring, evaluating, examining, appraising,
diagnosing, analyzing, judging.

Don't be thinking you can figure them out.

Have you ever noticed,

that if you don't share them,

other peoples' fears, insecurities, their sins even,

are totally irrational, irresponsible,

and even impossible to understand?

Other people's fears seem silly if we don't share them.

Other people's insecurities seem baffling

if we don't experience them.

Other people's choices seem crazy

if we haven't had to wrestle with that choice.

Other people's sin seems inexcusable, incomprehensible, inconceivable.

But you are only human.

One of the things I have relearned preparing this series

of the Sermon on the Mount

something I have come cherish, is the word hypocrite.

It has for so long, sounded so condemning and harsh.

It is a word sometimes thrown at those of us in the church,

a word used to point out

that we don't live up to all we profess.

No one wants to be called a hypocrite.

The word hypocrite is an ancient Greek word that comes from the theatre.

A hypocrite was the word used for an actor.

Trying to be something I'm not.

Hiding behind a mask.

Keeping the real me under wraps and hidden

in order to show you a different side of me.

Jesus said,

you hypocrites, you actors,

first take the plank out of your own eye,

take down that wooden mask,

behind which you have hidden,

your compulsions, your addictions, your fears,
your inadequacies, your insecurities,
your past, your greed, your anger, your selfishness,
your uncontrollable tongue...

First take the plank out of your own eye,
and when that wooden mask comes down,
and you look in the mirror,
you will see
you will see reality, truth, you will see clearly.

It was only a hundred words before that Jesus pointed out,
the eye is the lamp of the body,
that if you have good eyes,
the light will get in.
But for the light to get in, you have to remove the plank.
The mask will have to come down.
No hiding.

Paul said in his first letter to Timothy,

'Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance,
Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners - of whom
I am the worst.'

Paul wasn't speaking in hyperbole.

He wasn't enhancing or exaggerating his words.

King James translates him the chief sinner.

He wasn't writing this in 'pshaw, come on guys,
don't give me so much praise, I don't deserve it.

I'm the worst - okay argue with me and tell me I'm not.'

Paul wasn't exaggerating. His mask was down.

The plank was gone.

He had killed Christians.

Hunted them down. Imprisoned them.

Persecuted them.

The early church was initially terrified of him.

Paul knew, he was the chief sinner.

Do not judge here does not mean suspend all judgement.

It doesn't mean turn a blind eye.

It does not mean, don't speak the truth.

It doesn't mean disregard all consequences for decisions made.

Jesus said the truth is what sets you free.

Greed and selfishness, substance abuse, manipulative relationships

a loose tongue, a hard heart,

these can destroy individuals, workplaces, families, churches

friendships, marriages,

these things can and do ruin lives.

Don't judge doesn't mean don't speak the truth.

Paul knew the truth. He was the worst. He called it.

But he also knew how to measure it.

Jesus said, 'With the measure you use,

in the way you judge others,

you will be judged.

Paul uses this measure.

'Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance,

here is a measure you can use,

Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners - of whom

I am the worst.'

Paul writes,

even though I was once a liar,

a persecutor, and a violent man,

I was shown mercy.

The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly

along with the faith and love that are in Christ.

The very reason I was shown mercy

was that so,

in me,

the worst of sinners, the chief sinner,

Jesus might display his unlimited patience,

as an example for others,

so they can believe it is possible for them.

Paul knew how to measure.

He had clear vision.

He could see the grace, faith and love Jesus pours out on us.

He could see that despite all the sin that causes us to hide,
the measure to use when measuring another,
is the love and character of Jesus himself.

Psychologist Henry Cloud tells of a time he saw that measure being used.

He saw it with a group of inpatients he led at a hospital
who were struggling with life issues.

One of the members of the group was a man

Dr. Cloud calls Joe.

Joe had struggled with addiction for years.

He was a Christian.

He had prayed over and over, he had confessed to God.

But he wasn't able to break free of the addiction.

Finally his desperation and guilt were so great,

he checked himself into the hospital for help.

Going to group was part of the program.

One morning a nurse told Dr. Cloud,

that Joe decided he wasn't coming to group that day.

Cloud went to talk to him.

He discovered Joe had had a relapse the night before.

Dr. Cloud talked Joe into coming to group.

Members of the group asked Joe if he was okay.

He said yes, but he wasn't very convincing.

During previous sessions,

Joe had mostly listened to other group members.

He didn't mind seeing other people's reality.

But he kept his reality behind his mask.

But this morning, Cloud left him no choice.

Slowly, painfully, Joe began to tell his story,

allowed others to see his sense of shame and failure.

He spoke to them about years of guilt.

The fear of what his addiction could do, was doing.

Yet for all the pain it caused him, his inability to stop.

Joe could barely get out the story.

He stared at the floor.

He could not bring himself to look anyone in the face..

Dr. Cloud told him,

‘Look up at the group.

I want you to look into the eyes of the people listening to you.

You must do this.’

With fear, Joe, broken, raised his head waiting for judgement.

He looked around the circle,

and every pair of eyes looking back at him

was filled with tears.

All the planks were gone. They could see clearly.

Every heart ached with pain for his anguish.

There was no imputing shame, no condemnation, just compassion.

Grace and faith and love poured out on him.

With the measure you use Jesus said,

with the measure you use.

As well as telling his followers not to judge lest they be judged

and to be careful with what measure they use,

Jesus gave a corresponding warning.

Do not give what is holy to the dogs.

Do not throw your pearls before the swine.

Or they will trample them and maul you.

Your soul is a sacred thing.

Your mask doesn't have to be lowered all the time, for every person.

Dogs and swine can trample and maul.

You only need one or two safe places.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer points out,

'The more isolated a person is,

the more destructive is the power of sin over him,

the more deeply he becomes involved in it,

the more disastrous is his isolation'

However, a confession of sin,

taking out the plank, lowering the mask,

in the presence of all the members of the congregation is not required

to restore one to fellowship with the whole congregation.

I meet the whole congregation in the one brother or sister

to whom I confess my sin, and who forgives my sins.

If a Christian is in the fellowship of confession with a brother, with a sister
he will never be alone again,
anywhere.

Watch your measure.

On social media, in the circles at work, in the residence, in your family
where gossip and evaluation happens,
in the way you judge, you will be judged.

Find a place, a person,
where the plank can come out, the mask come down.

Where you can see,
the grace, and faith and love of Christ pour out.

As importantly, be the place, the person
with whom the plank can come out and the mask come down.

Be the place from whom,
the grace and faith and love of Christ pour out.

And with the measure you use,

it will be measured to you. Amen.