

Don't Judge, Just Ask

Matthew 7:1-11

Cradock Presbyterian Church

March 3, 2013

Here is one of the more misunderstood sections of Scripture, misunderstood in 2 ways. First, because of the word behind “judge;” second, because this whole group of passages, is intended to be taken together, to have ONE message. If you think about the importance of this day, you’ll understand why I believe that God pulled me towards these passages.

First, this business about “judge not, lest ye be judged,” which is how most of you were brought up to read this passage. What does it usually mean to you? It means you’re not supposed to “judge” someone, whatever that means. Police officers, judges, social workers, even school teachers, would have a hard time with this one if that’s the meaning! That’s because in those lines of work, making “judgments,” which might more properly be called *evaluations*, is maybe the most important part of the work. And we all make “judgments” regularly; you’d be unwise and unsafe not to. So what do we do?

Well, let’s start with making sure of what Jesus was saying. The word in the original language, κρίνω, means, in the first instance, “to separate, to put asunder.” That means something pretty strong! The rest of the definitions of the word have a connection to the legal world. One of those definitions says, “to pronounce judgement, subject to censure.” It’s important to me that one of the derived words from this one, κατακρίνω, means “to condemn.” Here’s the deal: Jesus is saying, “Don’t make yourself judge and jury; because you might end up charged as well.” The rest of this first part reinforces why you shouldn’t; the judgments you make and the measures you give will come back on you, in the same way you did them.

Then Jesus turns to why that is, in a practical way. Now, I don't know how many of you wear contacts, but I do, from time to time. The "speck in your eye" that Jesus talks about is more like having a chunk of something under your contact! You know what happens – you have to stop what you're doing, and fix that thing. Lots of tearing up, and blurriness. You'll be interested to know that the "speck" is, in the original language, something much bigger. The word in the original, κάρφος, means "straw, twig, or chaff." Big pieces! A speck, then as now, is something you blink a couple of times and get rid of. In that desert world, with blowing sand, these folks could blink away a mere speck easily. But who gets an entire *twig* in their eye?! Isn't that extreme? Isn't that just about *impossible*?

It is – and that's the point. This part of the passage is all about the one who acts superior, who claims clearer vision. If you're the guy or gal who says, "Hey! I see a twig in your eye!" then you're really saying, "In *my* judgment, you can't see. In my judgment, you have to have my help." Of course that's what it means! – because there's no room in anybody's eye-socket for a full-blown *twig*.

So who ARE these people who claim that others can't do without their help? Who see so clearly that they see a supposed "twig" in their neighbor's eye? They're the ones who have a real problem. The word for "log" in the original is, again, way better than what we usually see in our translations. The word is δοκός; it means "beam," as in the nice big pieces of wood that you don't find lying by the side of the road, but that have to be made. You know, like the ones right over your heads right now! The size of that implies *intentionality*; you got that beam in your eye because you put it there! And you

didn't take it out when you could. If you've got that big a problem, don't you think that ought to be the first thing you worry about fixing?

Now, we'd all agree that it's a bit unwise to go around sticking big pieces of wood in your eye, and then trying to do *anything*? Jesus thinks that way, too, and so he tells us how unwise it is. He uses the example of pearls before swine to show how unwise. You won't want those pearls after the pigs are done with them. They'd be unclean anyway. You'd be stupid to go in there and try to get them back from the "swine," which would have been wild pigs, probably, since Jews don't eat pigs and therefore wouldn't raise them. And there is the potential for ruin if you go that way, because wild pigs are pretty protective of their territory. This story interprets the first one, about the speck and the log. How unwise and dangerous is it to condemn others? It's as stupid as trying to do anything for anyone while you have a beam in your eye, and as dangerous as messing with wild boars. You could avoid either with some good decisions; keeping your eyes clean equals keeping yourself clean first; and being careful with the precious things you have, especially with people, is the way to make sure you truly value them.

But that's not enough. We all run into our times of need, our times where even if we're control freaks, we're "out of control," we're not able to be so independent. That's the point at which we realize, we're not above others. We can't have the control we want to, the ability to put ourselves above others, or to declare our ways, our thinking, right. In other words, to "judge." What do we do? That's why Jesus told this last parable, to remind us that all we have to do is turn to God. "Ask and you will receive; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who

asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.” Whose door is it? You know whose: It’s God’s. The point is crystal clear, it seems to me. When you’ve given up trying to judge others, to meddle in their lives when your own is a steaming mess; when you see your own stupidity and even have suffered for it a little, then you’re ready. You’re ready to do what you and I were created to do. You’re ready to turn to God.

We know we can trust God. What father would give a snake to a kid? Or give ‘em a stone to chew on? That’s like saying, “Here, kid, take this bike and go ride it out on 264.” There is, however, hope for all of us. God knows how to give us good gifts, how to give us what we really need. “How much more will God give good things to those who ask him!” says Jesus. When we put aside all of our pretensions, all of our desire to control or judge others, and turn humbly to God, we can trust God to give us exactly what we need, along with his love.

Today is a big day in the life of our church. We sit down and break bread and then *together* look at the life of our beloved church. We won’t do it by judging anyone; we’ll each take time to remove the beam from our own eye, and not ever worry about the smaller thing in our brother or sister’s eye. We’ll take care with this precious thing we have, this church, never throwing it into danger by careless words or actions. Most of all, we’ll remember who to ask for what we need, whose door to knock on, where to search for the answers. We’ll turn to God. And if we turn to God, we WON’T get turned down.