

Natalie W. Bell
June 12, 2022

Looking At Ourselves First
Luke 6:37-42

*“Do not **judge**, and you will not be judged; do not **condemn**, and you will not be condemned. **Forgive**, and you will be forgiven; ³⁸ **give**, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap, for the measure you give will be the **measure you get back**.”*

*³⁹ He also told them a parable: “Can a **blind** person guide a blind person? Will not both fall into a pit? ⁴⁰ A disciple is not above the teacher, but every disciple who is fully qualified will be like the teacher. ⁴¹ Why do you see the **speck** in your neighbor’s eye but do not notice the **log** in your own eye? ⁴² Or how can you say to your neighbor, ‘Friend, let me take out the speck in your eye,’ when you yourself do not see the log 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.*

These are some **challenging words** of Jesus, from his Sermon on the Plain. These are just some of the ways we follow in the footsteps of Christ. specific examples of living out the Great Commandment—
to love God and our neighbor as ourselves.

But there’s a problem-- we don’t necessarily wake up on Sunday wanting to hear hard words from Jesus!
It’s far easier to hear a sermon like, ‘3 steps to a better life”, right?
But what if hearing the hard sayings of Jesus,
Actually **helps us find the hope, peace, and joy**---
that only Jesus can bring?

What if **following these challenging words**—
Leads to a new way of life, a deeper, more meaningful life?
Isn’t it true that some of the **best things in life come through our challenges**?
What if our **faith** is similar?

The problem is we often think that Jesus’ words are **impossible, or impractical**.
But Jesus knows us.

He doesn't ask his followers to do anything,
That he is not prepared to *help us* do.

Truth is, we **CAN'T follow Jesus' commands**, on our own strength.
We need His *help—we need the Holy Spirit*
to help us not judge, or condemn, to help us give and forgive,
to look at ourselves before we try to take a speck out of someone else's eye!
We need Holy Spirit's power to **avoid the hypocrisy** that is so common for
Christians—we need the Spirit to show us the way of truth and life.

Today's words are not just ethical demands.
These are the way we **jump into the flowing river of God's grace and love**.
This is how we join God's way of life—today!

*“Do not judge, and you will not be judged;
do not condemn, and you will not be condemned.
Forgive, and you will be forgiven;*

If we are to dive into God's river—we will **hear these words, and do them**.
And not just on occasion.
We will practice them in everyday life—whenever, wherever
we feel the urge to judge or condemn or hold a grudge.

Does this mean we **NEVER make a judgment** of anyone or anything?
Of course not. We have to make decisions all the time.
Even Jesus goes on in this passage to talk about judging a tree by its fruit.

The difference is this—we are asked to make moral decisions,
we are **NOT asked to be judgmental or put ourselves in the place of God**.
We need to constantly ask ourselves, is this my place to judge?
Or is this really up to God?
Jesus is speaking against a **judgmental heart**.

The other thing Jesus warned against is **condemnation**.
This can be very tempting, right?

But condemnation of others is often a revelation of what is actually in **OUR OWN hearts!**

An example of this occurred with King David in the Bible, after his adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband Uriah. The prophet Nathan visited David and told the unsuspecting king the story of a rich man who took a poor man's pet lamb and slaughtered it to feed his guests. David was furious when he heard this story, and said to Nathan, *"As the Lord lives, the man who has done this deserves to die, and he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity."* And Nathan said to David, **"YOU are the man!"**

We should avoid condemnation, because it is not our place to condemn, and ***even God does not condemn, but forgives and corrects.*** Romans 8:1 says of those who follow Christ, *there is now therefore no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*

When we are tempted to condemn, we do well to ***remember Jesus' words about taking the log out of our own eyes!***

Jesus also asks us to ***forgive, so we will be forgiven.***

I once heard the story of a Turkish officer, who raided and looted an Armenian home. He killed the parents and gave the daughters to the soldiers, keeping the eldest daughter for himself. Some time later she escaped and trained as a nurse. Years later, she found herself nursing in a ward of Turkish officers.

And one night, she saw the face of this officer.

He was so gravely ill that he needed extra nursing care.

The days passed, and he recovered.

One day, the doctor stood by the bed with her and said to him,

"But for her devotion to you, you would be dead."

He looked at her and said, "We have met before, haven't we?" "Yes," she said, "we have met before." "Why didn't you let me die?" he asked.

She replied, ***"I am a follower of him who said, 'Love your enemies.'"***

Rev. Freddy Fritz, in his sermon, Judging Others, October 26, 2013, sermoncentral.com

Jesus also asks us to ***give and bless*** those we'd rather judge or condemn!

He says: ***A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, for the measure we give will be the measure we get back."***

When Jesus talks about a good measure being used,
 he's talking about how **someone would measure grain** for sale in ancient times.
 The seller would fill the measure, the measured container,
 three-quarters full and give it a good shake to make the grain settle down.
 Then he would fill the measure to the top and give it another shake.
 Finally, he'd press it down,
 until there was literally no more room for a single grain.
 And in this way, the purchaser was guaranteed a full measure;
 Because it cannot hold any more.

Rev. Freddy Fritz, Judging Others, October 26, 2013, sermoncentral.com

Following Jesus, and jumping into that river of grace,
All starts with US.

It all starts by **looking at ourselves** first.

We all have **logs** in our eyes that cloud our vision—
 and we need to stop and take a look at our own hearts.
 And we would do well to **leave all judgment to God.**

God is God, and we are not.

Thank goodness, right?

One thing I love about the Presbyterian tradition
 is that **we do not keep track** of who is going to heaven or hell.

We leave that to God.

Because God alone is sovereign.

God is the ultimate judge. We are not.

So we can **surrender that**, and leave it to God!

Our **desire to judge and condemn separates us from one other.**

We are not in the habit of forgiving, or giving a good measure.

This contributes to **the deep division** in our society, and even in our churches.

It's a **tribalism that has become toxic.**

We are so divided.

Red and Blue, Republican and Democrat, conservative and progressive.

And while there's nothing inherently wrong with categories,
 we don't leave it at that.

We try to wrap God up in it—as if God is a Republican or Democrat!

We don't need to go there--***God is way beyond*** our constructs!
 And Jesus is not a divider, Paul calls ***Jesus our Peace***.
 Jesus is the ultimate ***bridge-builder***,
 bringing people into one fold, one community, one body of Christ.
 And we are invited to ***walk in THOSE footsteps!***

We're purple here at FPC Matawan, just like most churches today.
 And that's ok.
 We don't have to vote the same or think the same way about social issues.
 But we DO all have to ***LOVE the same way***.
 We are all called to love, ***like Jesus***.
To not judge, to not condemn, to look at ourselves first, to give and forgive.

Which is so much ***easier said than done!***
 It's way ***easier to stay in our 'tribe'***, and put our fingers in our ears,
 instead of listening to one another, or learning from each other.
 It's easier to only watch Fox News or MSNBC
 Than it is to get out of our boxes, and be with people who are different,
 Or learn to love those who are different!

And you know what helps me with this?
 I have to remember—***I'm the strange one*** to other people!
 Someone thinks I'm the one who is odd, who is the 'other'.
 I am a 'them' to someone! We all are!

June is Pride Month,
 honoring our LGBTQ brothers and sisters around the country.
 And it's a good time to stop and think about ***our hearts and this community.***

Years ago, a radio station discussed ***a note a waiter had received*** from a couple at
 a Carrabba's Restaurant in Overland Park, KS. He had provided exemplary service
 to the couple, who openly identified themselves as Christians. The waiter was gay.
 The following note to the waiter was written on the back of their check:
Thank you for your service, it was excellent.
That being said, we cannot in good conscience tip you, for your lifestyle is an
affront to GOD. (You--Homosexual slur) do not share in the wealth of GOD, and
you will not share in ours.

We hope you will see the tip your (homosexual slur) choices made you lose out on, and plan accordingly.

It is never too late for GOD's love, but none shall be spared for (homosexual slur). May GOD have mercy on you.

Rev. Freddy Fritz, in his sermon, Judging Others, October 26, 2013, sermoncentral.com

Is that the way of Jesus?

Of course not!

I once was involved in a feeding ministry, and we were going to different churches asking for sponsors to help needy people to get hot meals.

I was told by one church that they could not support the ministry because we fed ***"Those people"***.

When I asked them to clarify, they said *"The gays. The transgenders. They will have to pay for their sins."*

I could think to say was, *"I'm sure Jesus would feed everyone"*.

I used to have a ***different attitude*** about the LGBTQ community.

I used to think of it in a negative way, and back that belief with my faith.

I used to think of them as 'those' people.

The first trans person I met--I didn't understand her, at all.

But all that changed when ***members of my extended family*** came out, as gay, and as transgender.

This was no longer about 'them'. It was about 'us'.

I know these precious children of God-- ***AS children of God.***

Family. Loved ones.

And I knew that they were not merely "choosing" this, but rather living into a truth for them; however hard it was for me to understand.

I realized that these friends are ***just ordinary people***, like you, and me.

They are not demonic, they are not the enemy,

they are not trying to take over the world or schools or churches.

In most cases they are just ***trying to live*** in a society that is increasingly hostile to their very existence.

Unfortunately, they are more likely to be harassed and abused,
 And trans people are far more likely to die by suicide, or murder.
 In many states right now, they are **not afforded the same basic human rights**
 as people who are straight.

Is this the way of Jesus? Definitely not.

Jesus was in the business of welcoming **all people—especially** those deemed
 different, marginalized, excluded, least or lowly.
 Which means **that's our business** as well.

It's **ok to not totally understand** a different identity or orientation.
 It's **NOT ok to demonize** someone for that different identity or orientation.
 It's also **NOT ok to subscribe to lies** about them,
 Or the **prejudice** of those who want to instill fear or division.
 It's ok to just let **people be people**.
 to **just love**, and leave everything else to God.

That's **who we are** as followers of Jesus Christ.
We are people who love—God and neighbor.
ALL of our neighbors.
 We are people who have **compassion** on others—just as Jesus would.

Sometimes that's just offering **a smile, a welcome, or a hug**.
 At the 2021 Nashville Pride March,
 Presbyterians from many different congregations walked through downtown.
 And one Pastor, Beth McCaw held a sign that read: **"Free Pastor Hugs"**.
 While some thought her crazy, people young and old approached her all day—
 Just to experience a loving embrace,
 and to shed tears, of heartbreak and relief.
 It was **a sacred space** for many who had been shown so much hatred.

Friends, **the Good News** is that
 we don't have to judge or condemn!
 It's not necessary, it's not our place, it's not the way of Christ's love.
 We are called **to forgive**, so that we will be forgiven.
 We are called to **look at ourselves first**—the log in our own eyes.
 We are called to **give a good measure**.

This is *not always easy*,
but it is the path to new life in Christ,
It is how we swim in the river of God's grace.
To which all God's people can say, Amen.