

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

“To Judge, or Not to Judge”

Our Redeemer Dallas 2020

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful. Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you (Luke 6:36-38).

You know, it *used* to be that passing judgement on another for their sins was seen as one of the worst things you could do as a Christian. “Judge not!” both the unbeliever and the believer would say, citing this very passage, or its parallel in Matthew (7:1). That no longer seems to be the case today, when anyone and everyone, living or deceased, is liable to be judged and condemned for the sins of their past. In fact, if you *don’t* call someone out for their sins and demand retribution, that is in and of itself now an act deserving of judgment.

So, which is Jesus advocating for in our text this morning?

Are we to judge, or aren’t we?

Martin Chemnitz is helpful here, pointing out in his *Harmony of the Four Evangelists* that there are various types of judgments.¹ 2 Chronicles 19 says with regard to the political ruler, “Consider what you do, for you judge not for man but for the Lord. He is with you in giving judgment” (verse 6). They are commanded to judge *rightly*, as we read in Deuteronomy: “Hear the cases between your brothers, and judge righteously between a man and his brother or the [foreigner] who is with him” (1:16); but they are commanded to judge. “For he is God’s servant for your good,” Paul writes in Romans 13, “an avenger who carries out God’s wrath on the wrongdoer” (verse 4).

There is also the kind of judgment authorized of the apostles, who are told in this very sermon of Jesus’s to beware of false prophets (Luke 6:43-45; Matthew 7:15f). Paul commands Titus to rebuke anyone who contradicts sound teaching (Titus 1:9). And even Christ Himself says in Matthew 18, “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault” (verse 15). Clearly, “Judge not” does not mean that we should never bring up sin or decide between good and evil. The whole point of this sermon, Chemnitz says, is

¹ Volume 1, Book 3, Part 1, p. 363.

precisely “to shape our judgment about doctrine and activities, either ours or others’, correctly, on the basis of His Word.”² In other words, evil must be called out for what it is. Scripture even contains warnings for those who *fail* to do so, like Ezekiel 3:18, where God says to His prophet, “If I [the LORD] say to the wicked, ‘You shall surely die,’ and you give him no warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, in order to save his life, that wicked person shall die for his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand” (verse 18).

After all, as Paul writes in Romans 7, “if it had not been for the Law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the Law had not said, ‘You shall not covet’” (verses 7-8). The Law has a very important function, and that is to *show our sin*. Like a makeup mirror that reveals every blemish and spot in horrid detail, the Law reveals every slight imperfection in thought, word, and deed, every way in which we have fallen short of God’s glory. It shuts our mouths, taking away every excuse, and holds us accountable to God, our Creator. We *need* that, or else the Gospel can have no meaning for us. How can we or anyone else be expected to take seriously the good news that we have a Savior from sin without first being told there’s a problem, and that the solution is not to work harder, but that “the righteousness of God has been manifested *apart* from the Law...the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who *believe*” (Romans 3:19-22).

So, if that’s not what Jesus means, then what? What He means is

Don’t be a hypocrite.

In the very next verse, He tells a parable, saying, “Can a blind man lead a blind man? Will they not both fall into a pit?” (verse 39). Yes! That’s *exactly* what will happen! The blind *can’t* lead the blind. How could they? They haven’t any more ability to see than the ones they seek to lead!

In just a few chapters, Jesus will send out the Twelve to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal (9:1-2); to lead, as it were, those still dwelling in darkness (Matthew 4:16). But here, in chapter 6, they’re not ready. Not yet. They have more to learn, more to see *in themselves*, before they can go and help others to see. They’ve all still got logs in their eyes, and as Jesus says to them, “How can you say to your brother, ‘Brother, let me take out the speck that is in your eye,’ when you yourself do not see the log that is in your own eye?” (Luke 6:42). That would make them hypocrites.

The word hypocrite means someone who plays a part on the outside but is someone very different on the inside. It’s an *actor*. Jesus calls the Pharisees hypocrites,

² *Harmony of the Four Gospels*, Volume 1, Book 3, Part 1, p. 363.

“For they preach, but do not practice,” He says (Matthew 23:3). They appear clean on the outside, “but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence” (Matthew 23:25).

But it’s not just the Pharisees. Hypocrisy is an evil disease that corrupts our human nature. It’s a problem for *all* of us. Consider Romans 2:1: “Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, *practice the very same things*.” You see, it’s not the judging that’s the problem. It’s the fact that we so quickly and easily make excuses for ourselves, our most serious sins, and yet we are at the same time most eager and joyful to point out the sins of others, sins of which we ourselves are guilty. Don’t tell me you’ve never downplayed others’ successes, or exaggerated their weaknesses, or spread rumors with an eye toward hurting their reputations, or rejoiced over their failures because it made you feel tall. That’s called being a hypocrite. That’s playing the *part* of someone who sees clearly, when in reality you are just as blind and incapable of leading. *That’s* what Jesus means when He says “Don’t judge.” He means take a look in the mirror, take a look at *yourself*, and recognize that you’ve got a much bigger problem than the “speck” in your brother’s eye.

Now, does that mean your brother’s sin isn’t serious? Or that you’re a worse sinner than he is? No. “For *all* have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). But, the reason why your sin is a “log” and your brother’s is a “speck” is because your sin is a much bigger problem for *you*. Talk about your brother’s sin all you want; it’s not going to make a lick of difference for *you* on the Last Day. But at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ “all people will rise again with their bodies and give an account concerning *their own deeds*” (Athanasian Creed, 38). He’s not going to care what so-and-so did, or what you *think* he did. He’s going to look at you and say, “What have *you* done?” And if all you’ve done in this life is exalt yourself, judging others unkindly for their sins, all the while failing to acknowledge your own, then you’re the one who will be judged. “For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you” (Luke 6:38).

But what does Jesus say? “Be merciful, even as

Your Father is merciful.”

I think part of the reason (or maybe the *whole* reason) we judge hypocritically is because of how it makes us *feel*: justified. If we can point out how others are worse than we are, then we can cling to *that* as our refuge and strength. We can take solace in the hope that when Christ comes again, He will see our deeds, our excuses and slander, and say, “You know what? You’re not that bad. I can see your point. That guy’s *way* worse than you are. Come on in!”

But, as we've said so often at the beginning of the Divine Service, "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8). We *deceive* ourselves—it's not true! That kind of self-justification is no justification at all. It is an *illusion*. That's not what Jesus is looking for. That's not the kind of sacrifice in which He delights, but "The sacrifices of God are a *broken spirit*; a broken and contrite heart, O God, *you will not despise*" (Ps. 51:17). He is not unkind toward sinners, but because He became sin who knew no sin (2 Cor. 5:21), because He has suffered and died in your place, He is *merciful*. He *forgives*. He does not hold your sin against you. You *think* you need to justify yourself, but you don't. You don't have to downplay others' successes; the victory is already yours Christ Jesus (Rom. 7:25). You don't have to exaggerate anyone else's weaknesses, for the grace of God is sufficient for you, and His power is made perfect in weakness (2 Cor. 12:8). You don't have to be jealous or suspicious of others, seeking to hurt their reputations; you are baptized; you have the best reputation there is: God's, who has made you a part of His family (Matthew 28:19). You don't have to rejoice when others fall, for at the proper time *He* will exalt you (1 Peter 5:6).

And so,

Be merciful.

That doesn't mean don't talk about sin. We *have* to talk about sin. *Jesus* talks about sin. But *when* we talk about sin, we do it from a place of *compassion*, confessing that we too are poor, miserable sinners, who would be lost but for the grace of God, who saved a wretch like me. We are gentle, not arrogant; honest, not devious. We neither throw up our hands and say "Judge not!" nor do we participate in witch-hunts for specks. But we take the logs out of our *own* eyes—we confess our sins and receive forgiveness—and then, only *then*, will we see clearly enough to take out the speck that is in our brother's eye.

For that is the loving to do. Not to leave him in his sin, but to say to him, "I know how you feel. I've been there. I'm *still* there. But there is a *better* way, and it's Jesus, who loved me and gave Himself for me, not that I may sin that grace may abound, but that I may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as He is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity. And He's your Redeemer, too."

In + Jesus' name. Amen. The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Soli Deo gloria