



February 10, 2019

Why Jesus? Because Jesus Loves Both Saint and Sinner.
Pastor Shelley Cunningham

Matthew 7:1-14, 24-29 NRSV

¹“Do not judge, so that you may not be judged. ²For with the judgement you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. ³Why do you see the speck in your neighbor’s eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye? ⁴Or how can you say to your neighbor, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ while the log is in your own eye? ⁵You 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.

⁶“Do not give what is holy to dogs; and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under foot and turn and maul you.

⁷“Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. ⁸For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. ⁹Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone? ¹⁰Or if the child asks for a fish, will give a snake? ¹¹If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him!

¹²“In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets.

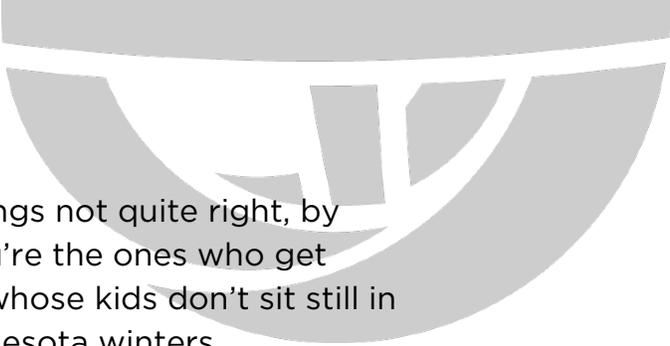
¹³“Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it. ¹⁴For the gate is narrow, and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it.

²⁴“Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. ²⁵The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock. ²⁶And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand. ²⁷The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell—and great was its fall!”

²⁸Now when Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were astounded at his teaching, ²⁹for he taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes.

I want to speak up today on behalf of the judgers.

You know who you are. I’m not going to ask you to raise your hands.



You're the ones who see other people doing things not quite right, by which you really mean *not like I would do it*. You're the ones who get perturbed by people who use bad grammar or whose kids don't sit still in worship or who don't know how to drive in Minnesota winters.

Oh, you may try to keep your thoughts to yourself. But God created you with opinions, right! And sometimes those opinions just ... slip out. Through a snarky comment or a raised eyebrow or a dismissive glance.

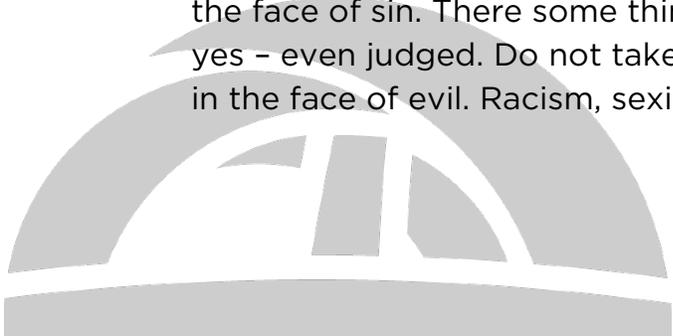
Now lest you think you're being judged, judgers, never fear. You're among friends. My own charming and lovely 16-year-old frequently tells me, "Don't judge me, mom!" Apparently I have kind of a judge-y face. Well, as I learned from my own mom, *you can't argue with what I'm thinking*.

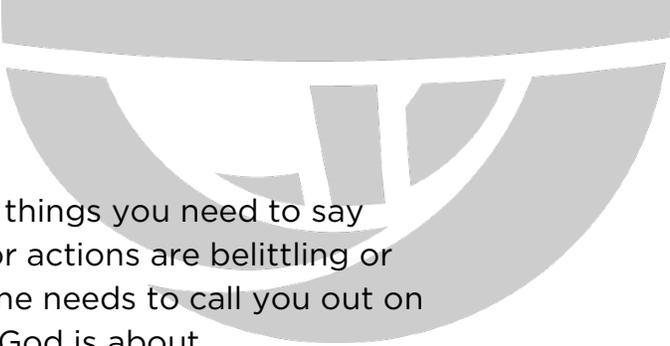
The good news: this really isn't what Jesus is getting at. After all, he just spent plenty of time in Matthew 6 sharing his own opinions about everything from proper worship practices to appropriate prayer postures to people who put their trust in material possessions. In other words, it can be okay to judge. Just don't be a jerk about it.

But here's the rub. Because if you're the judger, you don't get to decide if you're being a jerk or not. That's up to the other person. And if your words or smirks or dirty looks make them feel less-than-worthy, then you are.

If what you're thinking or saying demeans someone's humanity, you've crossed the line from having an opinion to condemning. And on that point, Jesus is clear: Any time our opinion places us in the right and someone else in the wrong, we've overstepped our bounds. It is not our place to deny someone's dignity or preferences or rights. When we look at another person and declare that they are not good enough, we are building walls, not bridges. This part of the Sermon on the Mount focuses on all the things that distract us from the kingdom of God - and passing judgment is one of them. It keeps us from seeing others as created unique and valuable and equal in God's eyes. Every time we jump to conclusions about someone else's actions we miss the chance to love them just as they are - to extend to them the same grace and mercy that Jesus extends so freely to us.

Please hear me: Jesus is NOT giving us permission to look the other way in the face of sin. There some things that need to be called out, named, and - yes - even judged. Do not take this text as license to keep your mouth shut in the face of evil. Racism, sexism, age discrimination are wrong. So too are





cruelty and abuse. If you see others doing these things you need to say something. And if you're the one whose words or actions are belittling or demeaning or putting down others, then someone needs to call you out on it too - because that's not what the kingdom of God is about.

Nor does this text give us a pass from having hard conversations. In fact, Matthew 18 describes a whole process for how to carefully, respectfully, confront people with whom we have differences. There may also be times that people we care about are making serious choices that are causing irreparable harm to themselves or others. We need to say something then, too. But in all these instances, remember that we are called to speak the truth in love.

That's the key phrase to remember here: in love. Love is what guides us to treat one another like we want to be treated. Love is what stretches us to give selflessly, feel empathetically, care whole-heartedly. If you are striving to love as Jesus loved, then you have to see as Jesus saw: With eyes of compassion.

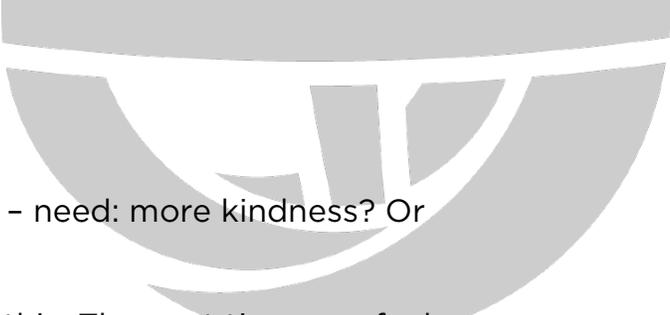
Preacher Tom Long argues that this text nudges us to push back against our human nature. He hears Jesus saying, "In the kingdom of heaven, your standards of judgment must be transformed. Therefore," he says, "do not judge *until ...*"

Until what? Until we acknowledge our biases. Name our privilege. Engage in deep self-examination. Shift our lens from self-righteousness to concern. This is another human being we are talking about! Every time your lesser angels purse their lips and raise their eyebrows at someone else, remind yourself that God is saying to them "You are my beloved child." Then, Pastor Long says, "Instead of a finger poked in the neighbor's face, we can reach out mercifully to wipe the neighbor's eye."

Dietrich Bonhoeffer puts it this way: "Judging others makes us blind, whereas love is illuminating." Earlier in this sermon Jesus calls us to be light for the world. When we see that others are just as deserving of God's grace as we are, and when we live like that, we shine. That is what Christ calls us to in this passage.

Friends, whether you consider yourself a judger or not, it's important to remember that we are only as kind as our most unkind thoughts and





actions. And what does our world - God's world - need: more kindness? Or more condemnation?

So how can this text transform you? How about this: The next time you feel yourself slipping towards that line of judgment, take a breath. Reset your expression. Ask yourself what you have to gain. And give them the benefit of the doubt. After all, this is God's beloved child you're talking about. And whether you're a judger or on the receiving end of someone else's critical eye, it's exactly what Jesus already does for you. That's good news. Amen.

