

Words of Encouragement *Judgment*
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Could you hear the judgment going on?

The chief priests and elders and the whole Council of the Temple judged Jesus and sent him to Pilate.

Pilate at first avoided judgment by passing the buck to the crowds—expecting them to release Jesus but...

The crowd judged Barabbas worthy to be released---not Jesus, as we might have hoped.

So then Pilate judged Jesus based on the crowds and sent him to the cross.

And now how many of you can admit to at least being a little tempted to judge the crowd and Pilate for killing Jesus, our friend, our Savior, our God...

Do you see how this judging thing just goes on and on?

It's good for us to pause and ask ourselves...

is judgment really what God wants us to be doing?

If we remember what Jesus said early in his ministry....we would have to say NO to that question. Matthew 7: 1 - 2

Judge not lest ye be judged. For with the judgment you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get.

Jesus is trying to tell us that God did NOT create us to be the judges of the world.

Think Genesis 1...God created us to be care-takers of creation but...

somewhere along the way, we took on the judgment job for ourselves.

Thinking it is our responsibility to judge and either condemn or forgive. How is it that we could so easily forget that God, our Creator, is the ultimate judge and the jury...for everyone everywhere?

Not to say that we don't need to 'use judgment' in who we hang out with. Who we marry. Who we trust. Being a follower of Jesus does require that we be able to tell the difference between right and wrong, holy living and profane behavior. But 'using good judgment' is not the same as 'passing judgement.' Or being the judge, jury and executioner.

And, of course, we need to 'make judgments' about what to eat and how to spend our money and who we vote for and who we make friends with but ... again...those judgments are to guide our actions and our conversations *in the way of Jesus*. In the way of building peace. Jesus was trying to teach us how to use those value judgments so that we would offer hospitality to strangers and visitors and would build stronger communities of justice and mercy. Using 'good judgment' is not intended by Jesus to be an excuse to condemn and insult and argue and fight with each other. Or to hide and close ourselves off from people who have different opinions and ideas.

Out of respect and obedience to his teachings, and his love for us, we watch what we do and judge ourselves in relation to the standard that Jesus has set for us. That's kind of what Lent is about in our tradition. But 'you judging you and your actions' in order to grow in your faith is very different from 'you judging me' or judging your neighbor or your boss. Or your president. Or even your enemies.

That kind of 'judging others'...is God's job. Not ours.

But I know we are tempted, very tempted...to do it anyway. We think it's our right to judge, don't we? This week, as I was pondering my own tendency to judge others, I noticed for the first time that my enjoyment of political Satire is a form of judging. Satire probably dates back to some of the earliest conversations human beings had around a camp fire. Satire, well done, can be Humorous and insightful at times. I guess I like it because it makes me laugh. But I realized this week that part of what makes satire funny is just how vicious and extreme it can be. Political satire especially can be used to twist reality and at its core...Satire is entertainment because it judges someone or something and points out their flaws and mistakes and then makes us laugh about it all. Seeing that more clearly kind of takes the fun out of it, to tell you the truth.

So let's ask ourselves...if God doesn't want us to be the judges of others, then what do you suppose God wants us to do, instead of that?

A couple of weeks ago during Children's Time,

I talked with the children about obedience and rules.

The kids were great....they all knew what rules are and told me about their favorite rules. And then I told them God's favorite rule: To love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength and to love our neighbors as ourselves.

That's what God created us to be and to do.

To put it simply:

God's job is to judge. Our job is to love.

And if we get busy with creating and sharing the beauty and bounty of love...with our neighbors. With our church friends. With ourselves. And yes, even with our enemies, then we will totally be too busy to be judging where people have gone wrong.

Not to worry. The Judging will still happen...but it will be done by God, in God's own special way. **The biggest question here this morning may be...**Do we really trust God to judge fairly and compassionately? There have been so many sermons preached about the 'wrath to come' and about the fiery lakes and outer darkness. There are so many rules in the Bible and prophecies and plagues of locusts and grasshoppers. One of the Confirmation youth is quite fascinated with the Revelation of John and how it describes these awful things that are going to happen. So I draw him...and us ...back to what Jesus said to his disciples and the people around him...

John 3: 16 and 17 tells us,

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son,
so that everyone who believes in him
may not perish but may have eternal life.

**Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world,
but in order that the world might be saved through him.**

Not to disrespect all of the fire and brimstone preachers you may have heard over the years but God's great joy is not in judging the world and finding it inadequate and then condemning the world and the people of the world to the fiery depths. No God is looking around and waiting for and eager for the chance to save the world and to see...problems solved...wholeness restored...health regained...and especially to see love rejoicing.

That's the kind of God we have...as our opening Psalm said:

⁸He judges the world with righteousness;

he judges the peoples with equity...

he does not forget the cry of the afflicted.

We read it. We hear it.

And still we struggle with our finite human understanding to believe it.

To believe that God's judgment is always tempered with God's mercy and love.

I found a little story that may help with this...I'm not always so lucky with my sermons but let me tell you this one because it really fits what we are talking about.

There was a man on a crowded city street who, while distracted, stepped right in front of moving truck. Another man grabbed his arm and pulled him back to the sidewalk. Shaken, the first man thanked the other profusely. The rescuer accepted the thanks and disappeared into the crowd.

The man who had been pulled to safety, however, had been on his way to rob a convenience store. Now safe, he saw no reason not to continue. He did, but within hours, he was apprehended by the police and taken into court.

As he faced the bench, he was surprised to see that the judge was the man who had saved his life earlier in the day. When the judge asked him if he had anything to say, the man said, "Your Honor, you know me. You saved my life this morning. Can't you help me now?" The judge responded, "This morning I was your savior. Now I am your judge."

Both relationships were true and faithful and valuable.

You may have to think about it for a while and wrestle with what I'm saying here but I assure you: You can trust God's judgment.

God is good. All the time. And all the time...God is good.

Even when it comes to judging us and the world.

I value the words of John 5.30:

Jesus said: “As I hear, I **judge**; and my judgment is just, because I seek to do not my own will but the will of him who sent me.”

Jesus loving us and saving us and healing us is Jesus doing God’s will...
and we are called to do the same.

God’s will.

That means loving with God’s love.

So much easier said than done but let me assure you:

Every effort you make to be more loving...

Every effort you make to turn off the judging that goes on all around you and even in your own heads...

Those efforts are **pleasing** to God. That love is **valuable** for God’s purposes.

That action on your part and mine and all of ours....

would have made all the difference, that morning after Jesus was arrested when the weight of the whole world’s judgment turned against him.

Let us ponder that as we get closer and closer to the Cross where Jesus died. Amen.