



THE TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

NOVEMBER 10, 2019

JAMES 2:8-13

LUKE 6: 37-42

“IF YOU SPOT IT, YOU GOT IT”

If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, “Love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing right. But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. For he who said, “You shall not commit adultery,” also said, “You shall not murder.” If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker.

“Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment.”

“Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”

He also told them this parable: “Can the blind lead the blind? Will they not both fall into a pit? The student is not above the teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like their teacher.

“Why do you look at the speck of fl in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the LOG in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, ‘Brother, let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when you yourself fail to see the LOG in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the LOG out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.”

SERMON



Pastor Larson and his treasurer, Bill Johnson ended up in a heated argument over a seemingly minor issue.

"I suggest we go home and pray to God to grant us peaceful hearts," said Pastor Larson as Bill stormed past him.

After worship the next Sunday, Bill greeted Pastor Larson warmly. "I took your advice," he said. "I went home and prayed."

"Great!" said Pastor Larson. "So did I. I prayed that God would grant both of us peaceful hearts and a fresh start," said Pastor Larson.

"That's not what I prayed," said Bill. "I asked God to help me put up with you."

One way to think about the New Testament is that it is a collection of narratives, parables, letters, and reflections on how the early churches taught one another how to live together.

The original faith communities consisted of Jews who had come to follow Jesus. And they brought along their religious background. There were those who were called pagans, who had worshipped other gods and had their own traditions and rituals. And there were those who had little religious background. Individuals and entire households. And then the original followers of Jesus.

So much teaching was needed. No one was baptized as an adult without intensive and lengthy instruction in the faith.

No matter your background, said the churches, this is how we live together.



The early church invested in reforming, changing and transforming the people who formed these first church communities.

Because they understood that unless we allow god to reform, change, and transform us, we do not see things as they are, we see things as we are.

Unless we allow god to reform, change, and transform us, we do not see things as they are, we see things as we are....

We are faced with the same issue. There are long-term CLC families here. And new members. People with advanced degrees and others with high school educations. Former Catholics and lifelong Lutherans. People with no religious training.

How do we live together?

By whose rules? By whose values?

Recently, i had a conversation with people who work for large companies about company policies.

They said that if any employee called someone demeaning names in a meeting, made unsubstantiated accusations, was found to be spreading false rumors, that person would be disciplined. No one in the business world calls people names in a meeting, screams at the leader, or stomps out unless they want to empty their desk and be escorted out in the next five minutes. No one creates chaos behind the scenes in a business unless they want to look for a new job.



Businesses have policies, standards of behavior, corporate ethics that don't let you slander, demean, and make unsubstantiated accusations. And, if you do, there are serious consequences.

At first glance, churches have neither policies of behavior nor any consequences. We just excuse inexcusable behavior.

Well, you know bill. He's just a hot head.

Oh well, everyone is entitled to their own opinion.

Aw, he just has his own perspective.

Their family has been here a long time, so....

If a pastor tries to correct such behavior, he or she is seen as the problem.

If we are not reformed, changed, and transformed we do not see things as they are. We see things as we are.

Or, as they say, in twelve step programs: **if you spot it you got it.**

The man, secretly obsessed with sex, sees the cheater in every friendly man interacting with women.

The person who sees the criminal in others, has a strong inner motivation to commit crime.



The person who twists the truth sees the liar in everyone else.

The person with a secret problem with alcohol sees the alcoholic in everyone around them.

Here's the deal.

As a faith community, we do not have policies with consequences for poor behavior because **we supposedly are following an even higher standard of behavior taught by Jesus.**

But in my conversation with corporate employees, it struck me that church behavior is actually often worse because, not only do we not have policies about behavior, we do not follow the teachings of Jesus. And there are no consequences. **Usually, we are more worried about upsetting the people who are acting badly.**

The four gospels were written by four faith communities so that they would live differently than people "in the world."

But I ask you. How difficult is it to understand: **do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.**

How hard it is to understand: **judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment.**



How hard is it to understand: **“can the blind lead the blind? Will they not both fall into a pit? The student is not above the teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like their teacher.”**

This one might be a little tough. It means: how is it that people who do not study the scriptures, who do not work to understand the teachings of Jesus think they are entitled to act like they know the truth?

As a culture, we have lost all respect for expertise, authority, knowledge, and the truth of scripture.

No, today everyone is entitled to their own opinion no matter how ill-informed. Experts are nothing but elite know-it-alls. Authorities are cheats and liars and anyone is fair game.

I know a little about a few things. I know scripture, Luther, psychology, and music. And there are plenty of people who know a lot more about all those than i do and i still am try to learn from them.

I know nothing about any of the trades, but i respect anyone who knows how to work with their hands. It looks like magic to me. I have a financial advisor who invests for me. I call another pastor, the assistant to the bishop, or the bishop if i am faced with something i am not sure about. And i trust them because they know more than i do. **The hell with my opinion.**

Now it may be a bit hard to understand this teaching: **“why do you look at the speck in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the log in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, ‘brother, let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when you yourself fail to see the log in your own eye? You**



hypocrite, first take the log out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye."

Jesus is a master psychotherapist. Two thousand years before psychology, he is describing what we now call *projection*.

When we have a shameful something in our soul that we cannot own: lust, envy, a tendency to cheat, a power complex, an addiction, a hidden problem with anger, **this is the log in our own eye that we do not want to see.**

And we find someone who has a **speck** of one of these tendencies, **not a log, but a speck, a little bit**, and we project our **log**—what we hate in ourselves—onto that person.

If you want to know about your own hidden log, **look at your enemies**, look at the people you hate.

If you spot it, you got it.

Jesus tells us to stop projecting our log onto other people. We are falsely damaging someone else out of our own spiritual and psychological immaturity.

Jesus tells us to go and figure out what we now call our *shadow self*—the things we can't stand in ourselves—**our logs**—and stop judging, condemning, and hurting other people.



If we are not reformed, changed, and transformed, we do not see things as they are. We see things as we are. We see the world with a log in our eye that distorts and destroys other people.

Hurt people hurt people....

There is the higher standard that we are asked to live.

But it is hard. Our first instinct is to judge. Our first instinct is to condemn. Our first instinct is not to have mercy. This is why we have to allow god to work on us to reform, change, and transform us.

CLC is meant to be a spiritual laboratory. Instead, and i hate to say it, we can act worse than employees in business, education, and health care.

Can we collectively draw a line today and say we actually want to live by the teachings of Jesus here at CLC? That these are our guidelines.

Or are we going to be just another congregation that pays lip service and then acts out in mean, accusatory, and slanderous ways?

This is what Jesus and the first faith communities came up with:

Judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment.



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 and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”

“can the blind lead the blind? Will they not both fall into a pit? ⁴⁰ the student is not above the teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like their teacher.

“why do you look at the speck in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the log in your own eye? ⁴² how can you say to your brother, ‘brother, let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when you yourself fail to see the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.

The change in us is to begin here within the faith community. Then we can go into the world and make a difference elsewhere. Otherwise we come in the door and leave by the door and nothing changes.

And then I’m left wondering why we’re here.

SERMON SONG

Wonderful World by Louie Armstrong