

"HERE COMES THE JUDGE"
September 30, 1990

TEXT: Matthew 7:1-2 "Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get."

My text this morning comes, not from the words you have just heard, nor even from the same Gospel. But it takes John's words and sums them up as nothing else can. It is from Matthew's Gospel, chapter seven, the first two verses: "Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get."

I chose that text, in part, because of the young people we have just commissioned as our P. F. officers. Some of them went to Senior High Camp this summer where one of their lessons was on that very passage. And sometime during the coming year, human nature being what it is, they may find themselves unhappy with the way things are going. They may feel like being critical.

Unfortunately, criticizing too often becomes a habit. We may not even realize just how critical we are. I once read about a man who was always criticizing his wife. No matter what she did, she could not seem to please him. One day she asked him what he would like for breakfast, and he answered, "Coffee and toast, grits and sausage. and two eggs --one scrambled and one fried." In a few minutes she had the food on the table just the way he wanted. Or so she thought. But one look at the plate and he complained, "You scrambled the wrong egg!"

Now, of course, that is just a story, but some people are like that. And a some of us are like that some of the time. So I chose this text, not just for the P.F.'ers, but for all of us: "Judge not, that you be not judged." It is one of the keys to abundant living.

I realize, of course, not everyone thinks so. In my Bible classes over the years, very few of the things we talked about ever gave rise to such objections. Invariably someone would complain, "But how can we go through life without making any judgments?" I do not think that Jesus ever meant we should.

After all, his culture --like our own-- was based on the concept of law. And he promised that not one jot or tittle --that is, not the smallest letter, or the tiniest punctuation mark-- would ever be altered. And, in that same chapter of Matthew, he warned us to "beware of false prophets", saying, "You will know them by their fruits." (Matthew 7:16)

Furthermore, Jesus often made judgments, himself. For instance, he said that it is "better to give than to receive." He told his disciples that the poor widow with her two little copper coins gave more than all the wealthy pharisees who made such display of giving. And he said that the penitent tax-collector went to his home justified while the proud pharisee did not. Obviously he did not mean we should never make judgments.

Then what did he mean? That is where this morning's scripture comes in. It tells about a woman who was caught in the very act of adultery. There was no question about her guilt. Nor may we suppose that Jesus excused what she did. Remember he said to her, "Go and sin no more."

But, when the pharisees brought her to him and demanded that she be stoned, he said, "Let him among you who has no guilt, himself, cast the first stone." And, when her would-be executioners had all faded away, he said to her, "Neither do I condemn you." He judged her adulterous behavior, but he did not judge her as a person. I am convinced that that is what he meant when he said, "Judge not that you be not judged."

In his book, The Business of Living, Dr. Jack Grossman points out that there are three different kinds of judging. The first is opinion --or personal preference. Whenever I get the chance, I choose baked potatoes instead of French fries because I like them better. All of us make such judgments and make them many times a day. We decide what to wear, what to eat, how and with whom to spend our time often for no other reason than personal preference. It is hard to believe that Jesus did not do the same.

The second kind of judging, writes Dr. Grossman, is evaluation. Determining the value of situations, things and actions based upon some kind of explicit or implied standard. Good and bad, legal and illegal, right and wrong, useful and useless, helpful and harmful --these are some of the words we use in expressing such judgments. And, as we have already seen, Jesus used many of those words, himself.

But the third kind of judging is different. It is the judging of people. In its negative form we call it "blaming", and that is what Jesus would not do. He did not mean we should never have opinions. He did not mean we should never evaluate situations and actions. What he meant was, "Blame not that you be not blamed. Evaluate what people do, but do not condemn the person."

That, of course, is what we are often tempted to do. It is so easy to slip from "He did something bad" to "He is a bad person." And, it is just a little step beyond that to "His kind are all like that." That is the trouble with blaming. It is very hard to control. That is why we need to restrict our judgments to actions and not extend them to people.

The difference is more than semantic. It is a crucial part of living. You see, blame almost never helps. It does not make others do what we want. It only makes them defensive. Think, for instance, how you felt the last time someone said, "The trouble with you is" I am sure you did not like it.

Chances are you did not like the one who said it either. Mignon McLaughlin writes, "Nobody wants constructive criticism, it is all we can do to put up with constructive praise." If you have been criticized, perhaps you still carry a grudge. Or maybe you just ignore the person who judged you. But that is another trouble with blaming. It destroys relationships --not only at the time, but for a long time after.

And, finally, though it may feel good at the time, blaming hurts us, too. There is something deep inside --way down in the sub-conscious-- which listens very carefully to everything we say. And, when we say that others are bad because they have done something bad, that "something" is easily convinced.

But then it takes the obvious next step. It says to itself, "But you sometimes do bad things, too. So you, too, must be bad. If so, you do not deserve to be happy. You do not deserve to be successful. You deserve to be punished." And somehow it manages to punish us. As someone once observed, when you point the finger at others, three fingers point back at you.

So, you see, blaming is one of the most destructive things we can do. It makes others feel bad. It polarizes relationships. It makes solutions more difficult to achieve. And, sooner or later, it leads to blaming ourselves. When Jesus said, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself," he was stating a universal truth. That is why he said, ". . . if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive you; but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." And, even if He did, we would not forgive ourselves.

Have opinions and preferences. There is nothing wrong with that. And there is no way to avoid them. Evaluate actions and situations. You can not function unless you do. But "Judge not that you be not judged." It is not semantics. It is the difference between abundant living and the bitter fruits of blaming.

The story is told of a woman who never criticized others. One day some of her friends were speaking about a man who apparently had no redeeming qualities. But, after listening for a while, she said "Well, he's a good whistler. Let's at least give him credit for that." How much better this world would be --how much happier we would be-- if only we could be like that.