

FIRST LESSON: Isaiah 9: 23-24
SECOND LESSON: Luke 6:27-38
February 20, 2022

“The Measure You Give”
Sermon © Lisa C. Farrell

As George Washington once said, “It’s really difficult to corroborate quotes found on the internet.” Erroneously attributed to Carl Jung is this one: “Thinking is difficult, that’s why most people judge.” He didn’t say that, but he did say something close to it and a bit more ominous: “Thinking is difficult, therefore let the herd pronounce judgment!” Group think involves little actual thinking. And group judgment can be a very dangerous and even life-threatening reality for those being judged.

The passage from scripture we read today is rich, rich and incredibly challenging. Everything Jesus says flies in the face of how society actually operates, showing us just how far we are from the way God desires us to live. We don’t love our enemies; we hate them and seek to harm those who harm us. We curse those who curse us. We certainly don’t pray for them! A slap on the cheek was a direct challenge to a man’s honor, the equivalent of being challenged to a duel. Turning the other cheek to be slapped there as well would be the ultimate humiliation. No one would respect a man who did that. Give to everyone who asks and not expect to be repaid? A recipe for poverty!

The standard Jesus presents to us is the standard of the nature of God. Anyone can love someone who loves them. But God loves even those who hate God. Anyone can lend money to someone from whom they expect repayment. But God gives generously to all. If we truly want to be like God then we will love our enemies and do good to them. We will lend and not demand the money back from the one who has developed a very convenient case of amnesia. And this is really hard!

If I am honest, I constantly fail to live up to this standard. I remember all my childhood enemies. And I have never prayed for them. Maybe I should start. I remember the people who owe me money. I know who they are *years later!* This is wrong. I am holding on to a judgment against them. They have forgotten. But I haven’t. What I need to ask myself is, could I have done this to someone else and also forgotten? Why should I judge them when I am in need of grace myself, if not in this area, then in others?

When Jesus calls us to love, the word in scripture is *agape*. We know Jesus would have taught in Aramaic and the Greek is a translation, but it would have been a good translation because we are dealing with first hand sources. Jesus was not talking about warm, fuzzy feelings. He was talking about what we do, about how we behave. I may not like that person at all, but

God calls me to act in their best interest. That is agape love. And this does not mean giving them whatever they want. **It means giving them what they need.** If I take the high road and live as God wants me to live, then I am no longer allowing the lowest common denominator to set the agenda. I am breaking the vicious cycle of violence and revenge. I am not actually giving up power, but taking it back.

Jesus says, if we do these things—love the unlovable and give without conditions then we are children of the Most High. We are to be merciful, as God is merciful. And it all comes down to this: “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.”

Our minds are not wired for mercy and grace. Our minds are wired for instant judgement and rejection. Part of this is necessary for survival. We need to make split second decisions about danger. We don't have time to weigh all the possibilities when a tiger is about to jump. But unfortunately for us, judging is so much easier than thinking that a lot of people avoid thinking altogether.

Jesus says, “Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned.” These Greek words are legal words. Judging involves a verdict. To condemn is to take it one step further. The verdict is guilty. The sentence is passed. The person is condemned.

We do this to people, don't we? I prayed this week for 15-year-old Russian figure skater, Kamilia Valieva. She didn't decide to take a banned substance. Her coaches did that to her. And when she fell on the ice with the pressure of the world on her they were harsh and critical. She was given no support. She was a thing—a tool in the hands of others—not a child in need of love and help. Rejected and condemned on all sides I prayed for God to provide her with protection, love and safety. Our figure skaters can choose who their coaches are. I am not so sure that is true in Russia. I suspect she has never had much control over her own life or her own body. Her talent was there to be exploited.

We make snap judgments every day. It could be judging an athlete like Valieva caught up in a doping scandal. It could be something as simple as not liking like the way someone looks or how they act. The clerk in the store was rude. The waitress was a mess. The other driver is an idiot. We make no allowances. We don't consider that maybe the clerk is under a lot of pressure trying to work and go to school. We don't imagine that maybe the waitress had been up half the night with a sick child. We don't think that perhaps the other driver was distracted because of grief or loss. We give no one the benefit of the doubt. We just judge. We judge because judging is easy. Thinking compassionately requires effort.

In place of our harsh judgments God wants us to be overflowing with grace. The measure of grace we give others will be the measure of grace we receive. I certainly want God to forgive me when I mess up. I want all the grace

and second chances I can get! If this is what I want for myself, Jesus says this is what I should give to others.

Of course, it's not entirely as simple as giving everyone a blank check regardless of what they have done. This is another situation in which we must compare scripture to scripture. When crimes are committed, justice must be done. Without justice there is no peace. People must be called to account. But the ultimate judgement of where people stand before God is not for me to make. I am appalled by the killers of Ahmaud Arbery. But God knows all of the things that went in to making these men who they became, and God is in charge of their souls, not me. To put this another way which has unfortunately become cliché—hurt people hurt people. These men are the product of their upbringing. There are reasons why they became who they became. Only God can untangle it. But they are not beyond grace. They could have their eyes opened and their hearts transformed in prison.

We judge people casually and on a grand scale in our society. Politicians and celebrities are all fair game. As Oscar Wilde might have said (but who really knows) "It's not whether you win or lose, it's how you place the blame." But being judgmental can pervade our lives and warp our perspective. Judging someone doesn't actually define who they are. It defines who WE are. We measure others by the way we *think* they are measuring us. We have in our heads an invisible standard that no one can meet, even ourselves. We can't extend grace to anyone else because we can't extend it to ourselves. Secretly we have looked at ourselves and found us wanting. We're not smart enough, thin enough, pretty enough, handsome enough. We don't have the right career, the right house, the right spouse or perfect children. We don't work hard enough or play hard enough. We haven't turned up on the cover of Forbes Magazine this week. We are certainly not holy enough. We know that because we can't even face what we hide deep inside ourselves. So if I don't measure up, then you cannot possibly measure up, and if I see a flaw in you that I know I am hiding in myself all bets are off. But God says STOP. It's all by grace. There is no good enough. There is only God's love and mercy welcoming us home. The measure we give will be the measure we receive. Amen.

Isaiah 9: 23-24

²³ This is what the Lord says:

"Let not the wise boast of their wisdom
or the strong boast of their strength
or the rich boast of their riches,

²⁴ but let the one who boasts boast about this:

that they have the understanding to know me,
that I am the Lord, who exercises kindness,
justice and righteousness on earth,
for in these I delight,"

declares the Lord.

Luke 6:27-38

27 “But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, **28** bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. **29** If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also. If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt from them. **30** Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. **31** Do to others as you would have them do to you.

32 “If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. **33** And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. **34** And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, expecting to be repaid in full. **35** But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. **36** Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

37 “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.”