

Good morning church!

It is an honor and privilege to bring this morning's message to you. If you do not know me, I am Pastor Pat Dunn, Pastor of Congregational Care and the choir director, whom I gave the day to. Before I read our scripture for today, I want to say a few words about what I do as your pastor of Congregational Care. I oversee our Central Care Ministries which I understand used to be called VIP. The Central Care Ministries include our Stephen's Ministry, Grief Share, Intercessory prayer team and our Central Care team who make calls either on the phone or in person to our members who are cannot attend our services in person. I have a great team; Our Stephen Ministers and our Grief Share team provide healing to those who are struggling with life's problems. Our Central Care Team also provide much needed personal visits to those who might be in the hospital, or care facilities such as Assisted living or Nursing facilities. I try to make personal visits as much as possible and on Communion Sundays my husband and I take communion to those who cannot be here in person. Starting March 5th, we will be holding a service at Brookdale at 2 pm for all the residents there. Taking care of our congregation is my passion and I need your help to do that. If you or someone you know need a visit or a Stephen Minister or prayer or just a phone call, please, let me know. Fill out the connection card and turn it in so that I know what the needs are. If I don't know I can't help!

Our scripture passage is from Matthew the 7th chapter verses 1-5. If you are able, please stand for the reading of God's Word.

Well, I sure was given a doozie! Of all the Sundays to preach, I get this one. And of all the sermons I have preached, this topic is probably one of my least favorites. But putting all kidding aside, it is however, one topic that we can all use some reminders of. Myself included!

This passage is part of the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus continued with another one of his hard messages. The sermon on the Mount challenges us to go beyond the letter of the law and seek transformation of our mind and our heart.

I'm sure you have all heard the old adage "don't judge a book by its cover." We often hear that in reference to what someone looks like, or what they are wearing. Even how they behave, and the crux of the matter is we judge them.

I don't often use The Message translation, but for this passage of scripture, I think the Message puts it in a way as to there being no mistake about what we are not to be doing. Listen to how the Message translates Matthew 7:1-5

“Don't pick on people, jump on their failures, criticize their faults—unless, of course, you want the same treatment. That critical spirit has a way of boomeranging. It's easy to see a smudge on your neighbor's face and be oblivious to the ugly sneer on your own. Do you have the nerve to say, 'Let me wash your face for you,' when your own face is distorted by contempt? It's this whole traveling road-show mentality all over again, playing a holier-than-thou part instead of just living your part. Wipe that ugly sneer off your own face, and you might be fit to offer a washcloth to your neighbor.

Wow! Did that sting? It did me! But I think that says it in plain language. I don't think we can misunderstand any of what Jesus is saying here.

The other day I was in the grocery store and a young lady was in front of me in the check out stand, I quickly noticed that she was not modestly dressed and said to myself, “Oh my, I can't believe she is wearing that!” I quickly caught myself, because I have been praying about this message and our scripture passage has been in the forefront of my mind for some time. I immediately also said to myself, “Oh Pat, you are judging her by what she is wearing, you are doing exactly what Jesus tells you not to do.” Have you ever had a moment like that, a “come to Jesus” kind of moment. It is not fun, when we are convicted of doing something we ought not to do.

Luke translates it this way in chapter 6 verse 41 “Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye (or sister's) and pay no attention to the plank 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 plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

Luke uses the word “plank” Another translation uses the word “Log” Those words describe something pretty large. This judgment issue seems to be a big problem.

Jesus is telling us that we are not to judge others because we are not perfect, we have sin in our lives that need to be dealt with. If we lived in our own lane so to speak when dealing with sin we wouldn't be so quick to judge others.

Now I want to be clear that there are things that we must judge, but we must judge with mercy and discernment and in line with God's Word. It is obvious that we have to judge some things, or we would not be able to stand firm in our faith.

Ultimately, however, it is God's job to judge others and we can trust His judgment will be righteous and just.

Billy Graham put it this way "It is God's job to judge, our job to love and the Holy Spirit's job to convict. That is pretty plain.

As Christians we're viewed by many non-Christians as far too judgmental.

And the fact of the matter We **are** judgmental. Non-Christians don't like it and if I am truthful I really can't blame them. I don't like to be judged and I shouldn't be judging others. I don't want to be friends with people who judge me?

Telling people that God loves them while simultaneously judging them communicates that we don't approve of them. Why would the world want what we have if we are being judgmental? If we are also criticizing and jumping on other's failures. Pointing out their faults and sins.

My friends, this is not a pleasant topic. And when I am talking it is with three fingers pointed right back at me. I am as guilty as the next about passing judgment on others. It is not something we want to deal with. I may hit nerve, but I think we must examine ourselves as the scripture tell us. Remove the plank from our own eye. Are we judging those whom we come in contact with; are we judging the young unwed mother, the drug addict, or the homeless on the street corner? Perhaps it's the teenager who dresses weird or the lady standing in the grocery line?

We are told again and again that judgment belongs to God, and Jesus made his views on human judgment very clear. There are many scriptures on judgement.

James 4:12 says "There is only one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you to judge your neighbor?" Listen to that again,

there is only one lawgiver and judge he who is able to save. My friends that's not me, I cannot save. I didn't send my son to be the Savior of the world. God did! God and God alone is the only one who can judge. We can trust His judgment.

1 Samuel 16:7

But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart." We need to remember that God sees the heart, that's what matters to Him. It's not the book's cover, it's the content of the book.

So how do we address the problem of Christian judgmentalism? It's a big subject for sure, but I think these 3 things can help us tackle the problem of being judgmental.

First, we are to judge doctrine- we are to judge whether we are in line with God's Word.

We are to judge and line up our decisions to God's Word.

God's word is the final authority.

God's Word must be the measure by which we make every decision even if no one else agrees with it.

We can start by being in line with God's Word. When we are in line with God's Word and have our own house in order we aren't going to be focused on other's shortcomings. We have enough to do keeping those logs out of our own eyes.

And if we must make a judgement call, we can do it with the love of Christ being our motive. Our motive as believers is to restore our relationship with God and help others begin or restore their relationship with God. **This is where the second thing we can do comes in,**

We need to practice discernment, not judgment. There is a difference.

There is a distinction that can help us work through what to do when faced with hard issues.

When I try to 'judge' (the way the world we live in judges), it's almost never the right thing to do. But when I allow the Holy Spirit to help me discern then I can make the right decision, the right choice and I know my motives will be in the right place.

When we judge, the way the world judges it is almost always warped and twisted. It is not helpful and is often harmful. It's warped and twisted because we look at it through human eyes and we do not see what God sees. Remember judgment belongs to Him and as Pastor John puts it, even God waits until a person is dead before He judges them. Our judgment is not pure, it is distorted, God's judgment is righteous and His job alone. We can trust God's judgment!

Discernment, however, is by contrast, healing and useful. Discernment means that we look to the Holy Spirit for guidance and understanding. Discernment is the ability to properly discriminate or make determinations. It is related to wisdom. The Word of God itself is said to discern the thoughts and intentions of one's heart (Hebrews 4:12).

Life is messy and people are messy, but judging them is not the answer. Jesus said there is a better way, a more excellent way. There are always things in life to deal with, but when we exercise discernment things are so much better. Discernment, exercised well, helps us see people the way Jesus does.

There is a phrase, I have heard many times, perhaps you have heard it too, "the church shoots it's wounded. That is a sad commentary on the church. Jesus said I will show you a more excellent way – the way of love. Love your neighbor as yourself.

Can you imagine what our church, our community and even the world would look like if we used discernment instead of judgment. If we loved instead of judged.

And last

Let's start with Ministry, not doctrine or theology.

If we look at how Jesus approached outsiders, he always started with ministry and ended with theology. He loved hanging out with people who were nothing like him. My dad was an amazing man. He was a preacher and an evangelist. He loved people and it didn't matter who they were, or where they were from or

what they had done in the past. He loved them and started there. He was judged by leaders of the local church because he went where people who need to be loved were. He went to the local bar and sat across from people of all walks of life. He started with ministry first, with loving people first. With meeting them where they are first. It's what Jesus did. It's why he became friends with hookers, tax collectors and everyone else the 'righteous' people of his day despised.

Jesus would start with ministry and then eventually get to the point of why He came.

People who judge do the opposite. They start with why. They forget to show love first. I've done it. I have admit I have said "I can't hang around people like that. Don't they know what they're doing is wrong." But before I can tell them about Jesus I have to start by ministering to them first. I have to start where Jesus did and meet their needs first. When we start with theology we become intolerant. And that intolerance hinders our influence and our ministry. Again, yes we must make decisions and judgements and sometimes very hard ones, but we make those judgements with love and discernment.

Imagine what would happen if Christians today started with ministry. Imagine what would happen if we communicated God's love of sinners instead of condemnation? We would have influence. And we would use that influence to lead people into a growing relationship with Jesus Christ. And yes, ultimately, they would change. Their lives would change.

After all, human sin was dealt with at the cross. Jesus paid that price for you, for me, for all. We aren't saved through our own righteousness. Start by loving people and the Holy spirit will convict. Change will come over time. Michael Desgrossiliers with Elijah House puts it this way "Transformation is that process of death and rebirth whereby what was our weakness becomes our strength. Sanctification overcomes the power of canceled sin, but **transformation turns the mess to glory.**) Transformation is the result (or fruit) of sanctification.

I would like end with a story, one you have probably heard before. It is recorded in the book of John. There was a woman who was found to be an adulterer. The crowd of so-called believers around her wanted to stone her. They were demanding she pay for her sins. They wanted to be judge, jury and executioner.

But Jesus forgave her and released her telling her to cease her sinning. Each of us has found ourselves in need of God's forgiveness.

It is easy to walk contrary to God's will and direction even when not intending to do so. We must be sober and vigilant (I Peter 5:8). We must check our motives, our behaviors and our desires against God's Word and His plan for our lives. Perhaps, we sometimes act like the crowd of worshippers demanding payment for sins people have committed. Perhaps, like them, we judge others trying to make ourselves look better. I know Jesus expects more of us. I know he wants us to start with ministry and not judgment. I know that Jesus, is the only one capable of condemning someone, but he didn't condemn the woman nor require payment for her sins. Instead, He forgave her, just as He does us. His forgiveness is complete and available to all. I John 1:9 tells us that He is faithful and just to forgive us of our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness, when we confess our sins to Him. So, today, whether you see yourself as the crowd, who is judgmental or whether you see yourself as the woman who has committed sin, look to Jesus. Remember Jesus loves you. We can trust His righteous judgment. Given with mercy and love.

Starting with ministry as Jesus did with the woman brought to him instead of judgment puts us in a position where people eventually are ready to hear a "go and sin no more" moment. When we start with 'go and sin no more', we destroy our influence before we even get started.

Let's pray

Father God, may we remember that we are not a perfect people and it is by grace through Jesus Christ that we have forgiveness. Help us to not be a people of judgement, but a people of love. In your son's precious and holy name, Amen!