

“Plank Eyed Saint”

Matthew 7:1-12

Series: In Not Of Week 7 See Clearly

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Whew. It seems like I’m carrying around a lot of baggage these days. Heavy; weighing me down. And I’m having a hard time seeing everyone clearly out there. This darn plank is in the way.

Oh there we go. Good morning Woodside. Been quite a week, past few months, hasn’t it? No matter how you voted, there’s been a lot of finger pointing, judgment and strong emotions. I found the words of Theologian Jim Wallis helpful, “God doesn’t call us to go Left or go Right, he calls us to go deeper.”

Clearly, we all have some deep healing to do. This didn’t surprise God. He knew. He decided way back in August when we planned this sermon series that the passage for this week, the Sunday after a very contentious election period, would be on judging and how we are to treat others.

Where do we even start – Let’s turn to God’s Word as we continue studying Jesus’ teachings in the Sermon on the Mount.

“Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

“Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.

“Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces.

“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.

“Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are sinful, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him! So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.

I’m actually going to start today with the last verse - “Do to others whatever you would like them to do to you.” If you were at Worship a few weeks ago, you might remember the slap heard

around the world – the illustration Nathaniel used in his sermon message about revenge. “If someone slaps you on the right cheek, offer the other cheek as well.” Matthew 5:39.

When slapped with a pool noodle a little too forcefully in a youth group game, Nathaniel remembered Jesus’s words and did NOT react – turning the proverbial other cheek. We’ve all felt the sting of being wronged - emotionally, relationally. Jesus tells us when we’ve been wronged, to not react, but to offer love instead.

Here in Matthew 7:12 Jesus challenges us to go even deeper, telling us how to proactively treat others. The Golden Rule. Here’s how the Message translation of the Bible puts it, “Here is a simple, rule-of-thumb guide for behavior: Ask yourself what you want people to do for you, grab the initiative and do it for them. Add up God’s Law and Prophets and this is what you get.”

The Golden Rule is a teaching found in many religions. The majority of religions, however, state it in a negative way – “Don’t do to others what you wouldn’t want done to you.” Jesus asks more of us, not to just hold our anger, our reaction when we’re wronged. Jesus challenges us to take the initiative to do good to others. To always be on the lookout to show others the goodness and mercy that God shows to us. Game changer, right? Using that lens, let’s start back at verse one.

This verse is actually one of the teachings of Jesus people love to quote: “Do not judge...” Stop judging me! Hey remember – Jesus says no judging! We hate to be judged!

And yet what is the number one thing people call out Christians for being – judgmental. Do we think God needs our help – Jesus doesn’t have this one, clearly he needs me to step in here and help him see all the faults of my neighbors and friends.

Do we want Christians, the church, Jesus, to be known for judgment or love? We need to show the world the radical kindness, mercy and love of Jesus, not the flawed judgment of his people. Here at Woodside we strive to do that in small and big ways. This past Tuesday and every election, we open our building to the county for voting. We set up snacks at the Welcome Center and greet everyone with a warm smile and an offer of food and refreshments. Many people comment on how welcome they feel in our church.

This coming January we will once again open our Vineyard to our homeless friends and neighbors for a warm meal and a safe bed. It’s not an easy project – takes a lot of planning, set up, and volunteers. But its how we feel called to live out our faith – help others in His name.

And yet as individuals we still find ourselves tripping over judging right? Why do we find that so hard? Why are we so often quick to judge others? And to be clear, this is not a blanket statement. Jesus is not saying we should overlook all sinful behavior, but a call to be discerning. Jesus is rebuking the hypocritical judgmental attitude that tears others down in order to build oneself up.

It is so much easier to look around and see the faults in others rather than looking up to God to see ourselves clearly. And it can make us feel good – justified. Well at least I’m not as bad as

Bill and his family. They're ChrEasters – they only come to church on Christmas and Easter. I'm here most Sundays, you know when there's not a football game or something else I need to do. I've spoken about comparison before – we judge others so we can see where we fit in comparison – I might not be as good as Super Sue over there but way better than Bill and his family. And we pat ourselves on the back, feeling pretty good.

Jesus is wise to our ways and continues with his teaching. “Do not judge or you too will be judged. For you will be judged as you judge others. The standard by which you use in judging is the standard by which you will be judged.”

Do we want God to judge us with the same, often harsh lens we use to judge others? No way, we want mercy, grace, compassion. Paul tells us in Romans 3:23-24, “for everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard. Yet God, in his grace, freely makes us right in his sight. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins.”

On our own power, we could not reconcile ourselves to God. So he sent Jesus to take on our sin so we could be free, NOT so we could judge others. God judges us through the amazing grace of Jesus. How can we not offer that same grace to others?

Jesus goes on to say “And why do you worry about a speck in your friend's eye when you have a plank in your own? How can you think of saying to your friend, ‘Let me help you get rid of that speck in your eye,’ when you can't see past the plank in your own eye? Hypocrite! First get rid of the plank in your own eye, then you will see well enough to deal with the speck in your brother's eye. Matthew 7:3-5.

We all have planks – baggage, biases, opinions we carry around that cloud our judgment; get in the way of us really seeing a person. Allow us to make snap judgments and label a person - *They're from THAT part of town; they went to THAT school* – we can't be friends with them. *Oh they have XXX sign on their lawn? Clearly they have no clue.* When we judge and label we stop seeking to understand people. We choose to hide behind our judgment, the label we assign becomes a wall between others and us..

So what do we do – how do we stop judging people and love like Jesus does while still applying the Spirit's lens to discern good and bad?

Jesus tells us to work on ourselves first. He uses the extreme example of focusing on the huge plank in our own eye vs the tiny speck in our neighbor's eye. Some of you may remember my friend and former Woodsider Karen Houser. She and I led a bible study on the Sermon on the Mount. When we got to this passage, we knew we were guilty as charged. We would say plank plank whenever we found ourselves judging.

Before you jump to criticize others, talk to God and judge yourself first. Ask God to give you discernment - to show you your planks – where you applied judgment when grace was called for - where your bias and baggage cloud your vision. Very often the faults that bother us about others are the very traits we dislike or don't want to admit about ourselves. Ouch. When you take a long hard look at why you feel this way, when you judge yourself first, you will find it

much easier to show mercy, forgiveness, and grace to others rather than judgment and condemnation.

Jesus really packs a LOT in these 12 verses. On the surface, his words in verse 6 seem strange – “Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces.”

What is Jesus talking about here – dogs, pearls, pigs? Dogs in Jesus’ time were not pets – they were wild animals, scavengers, more like wolves than our sweet babies. Jesus is actually giving us wise advice, healthy boundaries. Some people just don’t want to hear God’s truth, his pearls of wisdom. Maybe they’re not ready; maybe they never will be. God wants us to keep reaching out, but to do it through prayerful discernment with him – to make sure we are reaching the people God has prepared to hear us. We need to seek his guidance, his heart and ask him to put in our paths the people he wants us to reach out to.

All of this focuses on having a relationship with God – seeking his will. He continues in verse 7: “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and the one who knocks, the door will be opened.” Matthew 7:7 NIV

God wants us to persist in prayer. It can be so easy to give up when we pray and don’t think we get the answers we seek. Jesus’ words here were not a magic formula for getting what we want, but an incredible invitation to a relationship with our heavenly father who loves us and knows that only by living in communion with him can we truly find what our hearts long for.

Jesus goes on to say, “You parents – if your children ask for a loaf of bread, do you give them a stone instead? Or if they ask for a fish, do you give them a snake? Of course not! So if you sinful people know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good gifts to those who ask him.” Matthew 7: 9-11.

How incredible that the God of the universe wants to hear from us and wants to give us good gifts. Jesus uses the example of our relationship with our earthly parents whose children ask for bread and fish – good and necessary items. If the children had asked for something harmful would the parents have granted the request? God doesn’t give us stones or snakes instead of what we need. But he also doesn’t grant every request in the way we think we want.

When we spend time with God, when we seek his will by bringing him our requests and needs, we see what a good, good Father he is. He out gives even the most generous parent. He is God – his love is perfect; he understands, cares for, and comforts us in the most loving way possible - way beyond anything our earthly minds can comprehend. As we spend time with him, we discover that he will give us what we need most and he gives it when we need it.

As we contemplate God’s love, we become more loving. As we look at his compassionate and gracious nature, we become more compassionate, gentle, warm, and helpful. As we contemplate God’s beauty, we are transformed into people of beauty. (John Mark Comer “God Has a Name”)

People of beauty with a heart becoming more and more like God's every day. People who stop pointing and start linking arms. People known for love not judgment.

So what action steps can we take this week to put Jesus's teaching into action.:

Think about what planks you may carry around that cloud your vision, how you judge other people. Bring them to God and let him help you put them down.

Look for ways you can Live Out the Golden Rule by showing goodness and mercy to someone this week. Maybe the driver who cuts you off in traffic or the friend who jumps down your throat over something trivial.

Think about someone in your life who you've judged. Bring it to God in prayer and ask him to give you opportunities for honest discussion.

Confession – This Message was really really hard for me to write. It seemed so simple when I first read the passage back in August. Judge not; ye shall not be judged. Golden Rule. Good stuff. Got it.

These past few months have been difficult. Hard not to be impacted by the election – the barrage of ads, texts, calls, signs that were seemingly everywhere - I couldn't walk my dog, drive to church or even watch my beloved Eagles without feeling the conflict. Judging, labeling – I was right there with everyone else. The planks were real and often ugly. I held my tongue, but they clouded my vision; invaded my thoughts. I so know better – heck I was giving a message on that very topic. The Sunday after the election...

I brought it to God again and again. Thank heavens he doesn't go by the three strike rule! A group of friends from Woodside went to a Casting Crowns concert. I was planning to go, but I was too busy... busy busy busy. Dawn sent me a video of one of the songs they played - an older song written over 12 years ago, but - Wham. The words hit home for both of us.

This line convicted me especially hard -

"Always looking around but never looking up. I'm so doubled-minded. A plank eyed saint with dirty hands and a heart divided." I need to do better. I know looking up – keeping my heart and mind focused on God will help me do that.

And planks? Our savior was nailed to a cross of planks... He suffered and died to forgive our sins so we could be reconciled to God once and for all.

We're going to end the Message today with that Casting Crown's song. Let the words wash over you as the band sings. And let us move forward loving like Jesus did.

