

March 6, 2016

I Have Sinned: Judging

John 7:14-24

Opening Words: One of our basic human spiritual needs is for forgiveness. It is one of the things that draw us to Christ. Jesus did not come into the world to be our role model. Jesus did not come into our world to be our teacher. Jesus did not come into our world to entertain us. Jesus came into the world to save us from our sins. Never forget, Jesus is our Savior. Colossians 1:13-14 says, *"He has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins."* Lent is a time to confess our sins and repent. This morning, I want to look at the sin of judging.

According to old Jewish law, there were three great festivals in the Jewish calendar. There was Passover. It was a time to remember how God led them out of Egypt. There was Pentecost. It was their Thanksgiving, a time to celebrate the harvest. The third festival was the Feast of the Tabernacles. It commemorated God's goodness to the people during their forty years in the wilderness (Lev. 23:33-43). The name came from the leafy shelters the people lived in during the festival. It is this festival that Jesus is observing in the text for this evening. Our Gospel lesson for today is John 7:14-24.

John 7:14-24 ¹⁴ Not until halfway through the festival did Jesus go up to the temple courts and begin to teach. ¹⁵ The Jews there were amazed and asked, "How did this man get such learning without having been taught?" ¹⁶ Jesus answered, "My teaching is not my own. It comes from the one who sent me. ¹⁷ Anyone who chooses to do the will of God will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own. ¹⁸ Whoever speaks on their own does so to gain personal glory, but he who seeks the glory of the one who sent him is a man of truth; there is nothing false about him. ¹⁹ Has not Moses given you the law? Yet not one of you keeps the law. Why are you trying to kill me?" ²⁰ "You are demon-possessed," the crowd answered. "Who is trying to kill you?" ²¹ Jesus said to them, "I did one miracle, and you are all amazed. ²² Yet, because Moses gave you circumcision (though actually it did not come from Moses, but from the patriarchs), you circumcise a boy on the Sabbath. ²³ Now if a boy can be circumcised on the Sabbath so that the law of Moses may not be broken, why are you angry with me for healing a man's whole body on the Sabbath? ²⁴ Stop judging by mere appearances, but instead judge correctly."

There was once a wise old man sitting at the gate of an ancient city. A young traveler stopped before entering the city and asked the old man, "What kind of people live in this town?" The wise man answered with a question, "What kind of people were in your former town?" "Oh, they were liars and cheats and thugs and drunks, terrible people;" the young traveler replied. The old man shook his head, "The people in this town are

the same way." Later, another stranger paused to ask the same question, "What kind of people live in this town?" Again the wise man answered the question with the same question, "What kind of people were in your former town?" The second traveler answered, "Oh, I left a fine town. The people were good and kind and honest and hardworking." The wise man smiled and said, "The people in this town are the same way." That is how the story ended.

What is the point of the story? It is really quite simple. You know the truth. Our attitude towards others affects the way we look at life, and the way we are treated by others. People who are kind and forgiving toward others, usually experience tolerance. People who are harsh and critical toward others, usually experience harsh treatment. Let me ask you this question: What kind of people live in your town? If that question makes you think, say, **"Amen!"**

Let us look at this morning's text together. According to verse 14, the Festival of the Tabernacle is about half over. Jesus goes to the temple and begins to teach. There is nothing orderly about his lecture. He changes the topic three times in ten verses. First, he talks about his authority. It came from God. Second, he talks about his enemies. They are trying to kill him. Third, he talks about judging others. The orthodox leaders of the faith have been judging Jesus because he healed the man at the pool on the Sabbath (John 5). Through the legalistic eyes of his enemies, Jesus had sinned. To them, the law was more important than the people. To Jesus, people were more important than the law. What is more important to you?

This evening, I want to look at verse 24: *"Stop judging by mere appearances, and make the right judgment."* I am going to expound on that verse by asking you three questions. The first question is: when was the last time you judged? This is the second question: what is "right" judgment? This is the third and final question: what do your judgments say about you? My goal is to help you have a clearer understanding of judging so you can have a clearer understanding of God's will for your life. So if you are ready to begin, say, **"Amen!"**

History tells us Winston Churchill was forced to make a painful choice during World War II. The British secret service had broken the Nazi code, and informed Churchill that the Germans were going to bomb Coventry. He had two alternatives: (1) evacuate the citizens and save hundreds of lives at the expense of indicating to the Germans that the code was broken; or (2) take no action, which would kill hundreds, but keep the information flowing and possibly save many more lives. Churchill chose the second option. That story illustrates for us that life is filled with choices. With every choice you are forced to make a judgment.

When was the last time you judged?

This is question number one. When was the last time you judged? I think it is important to be honest. We judge things all the time. Webster defines judgment as "an opinion

formed after consideration". Wrapped in that consideration is judgment. Let me state the obvious. You have made many right choices in life, so you have made some right judgments. It is impossible to live in this world and not judge. Some of the judgments we make have few consequences and are short term. For example, where are you going for lunch? How much are you going to eat for lunch? Are you going to take a nap after lunch? However, other judgments we make have long term consequences. Are you going to go to college, or join the military? Do you want to remain single, or marry? Who are you going to marry? How soon do you want to retire? We judge things all the time because we are forced to make decisions! If you can agree with that, say, **"Amen!"**

Have you noticed, there is a great deal of racial tension in our society. It is hard to ignore because there are so many stories. I believe all lives matter. The tension came to the forefront several years ago. The name that grabbed the headlines was Trayvon Martin. I bet you remember his story. He was a seventeen-year-old black teenager, who lived in Sanford, Florida. According to many, he was doing nothing wrong. However, a neighborhood watch volunteer, a man by the name of George Zimmerman, thought he looked suspicious. Zimmerman was not a law enforcement officer; he was a volunteer. He reported this suspicious character and decided to follow him. Volunteer Zimmerman followed Martin, and was carrying a gun. He confronted Martin, and you know what happened. Martin was killed; Zimmerman walked away. Some say Trayvon Martin was guilty of nothing except being young and black. No matter how you look at it, the story is ugly.

What is right judgment?

This is question number two. What is right judgment? That question is based on verse 24, *"Stop judging by mere appearances, but instead judge correctly."* What does that verse mean? It means the choices we make must reflect the values of Christ. In several weeks, we will once again remember the last days of Jesus's earthly ministry. We will remember his arrest, his trials and his death. Jesus died as a common criminal, but what was his crime? He was guilty of nothing except loving everyone. You are a disciple of Jesus Christ! You are supposed to be a little more like Jesus every day. Everyone has to ask these next two questions for themselves. Did Zimmerman's judgment reflect the values of Christ? Do your judgments reflect the values of Christ? If that makes you think, say, **"Amen!"**

Years ago, we sat in the fellowship hall for a Wednesday night Lenten Communion service. You may remember. In those days, we sat in the dark. I was just about ready to begin when we noticed a young man standing by the door. At first, I didn't pay attention to him. When everyone else looked at him, I looked at him. Talking to the group, he told us his story. He and his family were looking for a church home. I felt sorry for him. He had only wanted to talk to an individual. Instead, he was addressing a small crowd. I walked over to him and we talked for a few minutes. At the end of our discussion, I handed him my business card. A couple of days later he called me. His

name was Eric. He told me why he was changing churches and told me he was going visit us the next week. He didn't come and I never saw him again. It was one of those strange things that happens in the life of the church. However, the most interesting part of that encounter with Eric was people's reaction to him.

I got three different reactions from people that week. The first group believed Eric. I think, they are the ones that are most like Jesus. They believed that he was just a young man with a family who was looking for a church home. It was just that simple. We are a church. He saw cars in the parking lot so he stopped to get some basic information. The second group was critical of Eric. They were suspicious of him. Some people thought he was looking for help. Occasionally, some people stop by who are in financial crisis, and ask for help. Most of the time we are able to help them because of the money generated by the Helping Hand. I will be honest with you. I thought Eric was looking for help. The third group thought Eric was here to do harm. You can't be too critical of that group. The twenty-four-hour news stations are filled with ugly stories. A stranger walks in and opens fire on innocent victims. Several people thought Eric was going to pull out a gun and start shooting. I suppose that was an option. We live in scary times. Can I ask you a question? If a stranger walked in today, what would you think? Would you believe his story? Would you be suspicious of him? Would you be afraid of him?

What do your judgments say about you?

This is question number three. What do your judgments say about you? Our reaction to a stranger says more about you than it does him. When we judge other people, be careful. You are a disciple of Jesus Christ! It must be the right judgment—the judgment that is made in the spirit of Christ. Do your judgments reflect the values of Christ? Let me end with the words of Mother Teresa. She once said, *"If you judge people you will have no time left to love them."* And all of God's people said, **"Amen!"**