

St Thomas and St Thomas of the Air Church  
Fourth Sunday after Trinity  
June 23, 2024  
rmcneely+

Be ye merciful, as your Father is merciful.  
Judge not, and ye shall not be judged:  
Condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned:  
Forgive, and ye shall be forgiven:  
Give, and it shall be given unto you

Today, Saint Luke takes us to a plane in Galilee  
near the beginning of Jesus' earthly ministry.  
There, Jesus spoke to a multitude of followers.  
Some to hear what He had to say  
Some in anticipation of another miracle  
For entertainment.  
But none of them could have anticipated His words.

It was a new religion.  
A new insight unto God.  
It was shocking.  
It was thought provoking.  
It was wonderful.  
It was a new way of life.

We break in about the middle of what would later be called  
"The Sermon on the Plane".

Here Jesus was addressing the tricky problem of criticizing others.  
How to go about the business of pointing out the faults  
Of friends  
Of Relatives  
Of Complete strangers.

We know from our lives how the best intended criticism  
Can quickly go awry  
and ruin any hope of improvement  
even destroying an important relationship.

Interestingly, hundreds of years later, the Church would  
Select this Bible passage for the Ember Days  
The time set aside for the clergy.  
The time when the clergy are directed,  
Schooled and disciplined.

It is occasionally necessary for the clergy to bring their faults  
To the attention of those committed to their charge.  
It is a sensitive task.  
Undertaken with the sole objective of improvement  
Of salvation  
Of everlasting life.

But all too often we clergy miss the mark and don't achieve the  
goal.  
And all often, we offend  
And do harm.  
In the extreme cases, drive people away from the Church  
Away from God.

The laity is not immune from the problem.  
We all know of cousins in the faith who are harsh  
and self-righteous  
in the manner of their rebuke.

In fairness, perhaps some of us have fallen into that trap.

Was Jesus, 2000 years ago,  
Mindful of such things  
Happening today in our lives?

Was he speaking across the millennia  
 To us, about how we should go about it  
 When we must do something to try to correct  
     A loved one,  
     A friend,  
     A stranger?

He begins with the advice that we should exercise mercy  
 As our Heavenly Father is merciful.  
 The objective is mercy not self-righteous satisfaction.

Jesus counsels: judge not and ye shall not be judged.  
 Is He saying that if we refrain from this business of judging others  
     That we somehow have a “Get Out of Jail Free card”  
     And will never see our own behavior judged?  
         No matter how egregious?

Is Jesus promising that if we ignore the murderous crimes among  
 us  
     That we escape our own judgment?  
     That we must ignore the genocide?  
     The kidnap, the rape, the mutilation?

This from the Man who stormed into the Temple Courtyard  
 In Jerusalem,  
     Fashioned a whip  
     And yelled:  
         “My Fathers House was to be a house of Prayer  
         And you have turned it into a den of thieves”?  
 Doesn't quite line up, does it.

So what are we to take away from this Gospel and amend our  
 lives?

Take a moment and consider the rest of today's Gospel:  
 Jesus offers the parable of the mote and the beam.

One man seeks to correct his brother,  
 But he fails to account for the beam in his own eye that  
 Blinds him to his own faults.  
 Jesus brands him a hypocrite.  
 And counsels that he should first tend to his own impediments  
 Before attempting to cure those of another.  
 So the second piece of advice is  
 that before we take on the task of judging another  
 We must first put our own house in order.

Sound practical advice  
 For who would heed the words of one  
 Guilty of transgression;  
 One without the standing to be able to point out  
 the faults of others?

But is there more perhaps?  
 Is there something in the spirit of  
 Forgive and ye shall be forgiven?  
 Give and it shall be given unto you?  
 Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those  
 Who trespass against us?

Are we to not only put our own house in order,  
 But we are to go about the business of judging others  
 As we would be judged by God?  
 To go about judging others  
 As God judges us?  
 As God will judge us?

Not from the spirit of arrogance  
 Not from the base  
 of demonstrating our self-righteousness  
 But, we are to exercise judgment  
 with a clear conscience and Christian good will;  
 For the sake of the soul of the recipient.

In fact if we did not exercise judgment  
 If we never condemned immoral and criminal behavior  
 If we had no jurisprudence,  
 Could any Christian Society long stand?

The key is in how we go about it.  
 The key is in the words of Our Lord.  
 The key is in the spirit  
 Never in arrogance  
 Never in self-righteousness or self-aggrandizement  
 Never in revenge  
 Never in retribution  
 But always in love, in Christian love.  
 With the purpose and only goal being to restore  
 To return the wayward to God.

Perhaps I am jaded.  
 After all, I spent a career in litigation, the object of which  
 was a judgment of the Court  
 And some of my work as Chancellor is to obtain the  
 judgment of the Ecclesiastic Court under the Canons of the Church  
 But let me impart some of what I have learned:

If you find yourself in a situation in which you must express  
 judgment and condemn;  
 Jesus tells us,  
 Do it only with the goal to restore and return.  
 Ignore opinion, innuendo, rumor.  
 Act only upon verified fact.  
 Be firm but be fair.

Judge only behavior  
 Never even attempt to judge a human soul.  
 That is the exclusive province of God.

God will judge you as you have judge others.

Remember the Golden Rule:

Do unto others, as you would have them do unto you.

As you point the finger of judgment

Remember there are three fingers that point back to you.