

# A Log Removal Operation

“Why do you see the speck in your neighbor’s eye,  
but do not notice the log in your own?” Luke 6:41

*Luke 6:37-49*

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Today's Gospel Reading is a continuation of last Sunday's text from Luke 6, known as the Sermon on the Plain (Luke's version of the more well known Sermon on the Mount found in the Gospel of Matthew). As a bit of a running start to this week's passage, here these from the verses that immediately precede it.

*Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.*

*Treat other persons as you would have them to treat you.*

*Be merciful and compassionate, even as God is merciful and compassionate.*

And continuing, now, with **Luke 6:37-49** (NRVS)

<sup>37</sup> 'Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; <sup>38</sup>give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back.'

<sup>39</sup>He also told them a parable: 'Can a blind person guide a blind person? Will not both fall into a pit? <sup>40</sup>A disciple is not above the teacher, but everyone who is fully qualified will be like the teacher. <sup>41</sup>Why do you see the speck in your neighbour's eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye? <sup>42</sup>Or how can you say to your neighbour, "Friend, let me take out the speck in your eye", when you yourself do not see the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbour's eye.

<sup>43</sup> 'No good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit; <sup>44</sup>for each tree is known by its own fruit. Figs are not gathered from thorns, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush. <sup>45</sup>The good person out of the good treasure of the heart produces good, and the evil person out of evil treasure produces evil; for it is out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks.

<sup>46</sup> 'Why do you call me "Lord, Lord", and do not do what I tell you? <sup>47</sup>I will show you what someone is like who comes to me, hears my words, and acts on them. <sup>48</sup>That one is like a man building a house, who dug deeply and laid the foundation on rock; when a flood arose, the river burst against that house but could not shake it, because it had been well built. <sup>49</sup>But the one who hears and does not act is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. When the river burst against it, immediately it fell, and great was the ruin of that house.'

Many decades ago a young couple moves into an old neighborhood. One morning while they are eating breakfast, the young woman sees her neighbor hanging the wash outside on a clothesline.

"That laundry is not very clean", she said. "Our neighbor evidently doesn't know how to wash correctly. Perhaps she needs better laundry soap." Her husband looked on, but remained silent. Every time her neighbor would hang her wash out to dry, the young woman would make the same comments.

About one month later, the young woman was surprised to see a nice clean wash on the line and said to her husband: "Look, she has learned how to wash correctly. I wonder who taught her this." The husband simply said, "I got up early this morning and cleaned our windows."

And so it is with life. What we see when watching others often depends on the clarity of the window through which we look.

There seems to be a common theme running through the seemingly disjointed sayings in today's Gospel passage. That theme is the conviction that **our character as a person and our behavior cannot be separated.**

Jesus makes the case that what a person does inevitably stems from who a person is. In other words, who we are as individuals, and as a congregation, is ultimately revealed in what we do and what we say. For instance, if we claim to be inclusive, and yet do not welcome others with openness and genuine hospitality, then we really aren't all that inclusive.

Verses 37-42 of the sixth chapter of Luke introduce **the theme of being non-judgmental toward others.** We learn that this can be accomplished, in part, through appropriate self-reflection and self-examination, followed by the necessity to always act with integrity.

Jesus makes the analogy that a blind person cannot see to lead another blind person down the road, for both will fall into a pit. It's an obvious warning to choose our leaders wisely. He follows that with a saying that reveals that a student will end up being like the teacher. In a similar way, this is also a warning concerning whom you follow.

We are asked to reflect, then, upon **who is it that you and I learn from? Who are our teachers and role models?** But Luke is not saying that imperfections automatically disqualify a person from being a leader. On the contrary, Luke's point is that **the disqualifying factor in leadership is not our flaws, but rather blindness to our flaws,** an unwillingness to critique and be honest with ourselves.

Following through with Jesus' instructions to not judge or condemn others, he tells quite a humorously exaggerated proverb in verses 41-42. Jesus draws the visual picture of a person who has a log sticking out of his or her eye while trying to extract a speck of dust or a small splinter from someone else's eye. This was obviously told to remind us that **it is often easy to recognize faults in others while being blind to our own.** Psychologists say that often those things we dislike the most in other people tend to be our own less desirable characteristics; a reflection and projection of our shadow side, to quote Carl Jung.

**Jesus teaches us how important it is to hold a mirror up to our own face, and take a good close look at what it reveals.** Using his analogy, Jesus calls for a vigorous program of taking an inventory of the logs in our own eyes, and when necessary, to embark upon a log removal operation – a bit of clear-cutting, so to speak. Or, to use an

analogy from the opening story, it's time to wash the windows through which we look upon others and the world.

Jesus uses the strong term "hypocrite" for those who don't. In the Greek, the word "hypocrite" originally referred to a theatrical actor, one who plays a role, who pretends, who wears a mask. We are taught that this is not appropriate as a follower of Jesus – not the being involved with theater part – but pretending to be something we're not in real life. One biblical commentator writes, **"Looking always to others, not self, can be a beautiful veil protecting one from honest soul-searching."**

**What we must do as Christians, then, is take off the veil, remove the mask, search ourselves, and be whom we really are.**

Jesus gets to the heart of the matter in verses 43-45. He underscores the inseparable union of what we are and what we do. More specifically, the union is between the true character of a person as revealed by what one says. "For it is out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks."

I prefer the saying that every junior high kid knows by heart, "What you say is what you are." Who knew back then that this statement actually reflected a concept highlighted in the Bible! (That juvenile phrase, by the way, was usually followed up with the response, "I know you are but what am I?" but that's a different sermon.)

Jesus then provides an agricultural analogy to emphasize his point. You will know the kind of tree by the fruit it bears. Apple trees produce apples, thorn bushes produce other thorn bushes. The application of this analogy is that **a good heart produces good thoughts and actions, while an evil heart produces evil thoughts and actions.** And yes, there is a bit of both in all of us.

Jesus teaches us is that our words, sooner or later, will reveal our character. We can especially apply this teaching as a warning concerning such issues as gossip, verbal abuse, spreading rumors, lying, telling off-colored jokes, making condescending remarks and innuendoes and the like. Jesus reminds us that **the words that come from our lips, in the final analysis, are the product of the quality of our hearts.** It is important, then, that we spend a substantial amount of quality time tending to our hearts – tending to the type of person and the type of congregation that God is calling us to be.

Catholic priest Jude Siciliano, from Raleigh, NC, writes, "For example, our church communities do not always produce the good fruits of mutual forgiveness. "We seem judgmental to non-members, we don't communicate hospitality to the outsider and marginalized, etc." Then he asks, "Does the community draw from the goodness of its heart? Is our church community [a reflection of Jesus' teachings] made visible in our age?"

So yes, perhaps it is a good time to take a close, reflective look at the goodness of our hearts, and to check for those logs that may be in our eyes. That includes not only our own eyes as individuals, but also the eyes of the church. **The church, as institutional religion, should indeed acknowledge and deal with the logs in its own eyes – and there are many – before judging and condemning others for having splinters in theirs.**

At the close of today's Gospel Reading, verses 46-49 form a kind of challenge. The person who calls Jesus "Lord" must also behave as Jesus teaches. We're warned that it is not enough just to listen to Jesus' teachings. This goes back to one of my favorite definitions of spirituality: putting our faith into action. There's really no better way to define this than with a word that is mostly out-of-favor these days: obedience.

Jesus makes his point with yet another very visual analogy, the parable of the two builders. The story Jesus tells presents the contrast between those who hear and then act upon what they've heard, and those who hear but do not act or follow through.

The person who comes to Jesus and hears his teaching, and then *does* what is taught is likened to a person who builds a house on a solid foundation of rock. When the mighty floodwaters come (meaning the troubles in life), the house will stand.

In contrast, the person who comes to Jesus and hears his teachings, but then does not do what is taught, is compared to one who builds a house on no foundation. So when the storms of life come, the house will collapse. To add emphasis, Jesus concludes, "And the ruin of that house was great."

To put it most simply, **we are warned about the necessity of responding to the teachings of Jesus**. It bears asking the questions: How would you evaluate your daily response to Jesus' teachings? How would you describe the foundation you have built your life on? Could it use a little reinforcement or undergirding? If so, today's biblical text will help.

To summarize, we've learned that we must be careful not to judge and condemn others. We can accomplish this, in part, by tending to our own faults before presuming to help others with theirs. We must be careful in our speech. We must be obedient to Jesus' teachings.

Add all this to Jesus' commands earlier in Luke 6 to love our enemies, treat others as we hope to be treated, and deal compassionately with others, and you and I have **a wonderful and concise description of faithful discipleship**. Or, to put it even briefer:

- **love all people,**
- **don't retaliate,**
- **be compassionate and non-judgmental,**
- **deal with your own faults first,**
- **be careful in what you say,**
- **and put all of Jesus' teachings into action.**

Of course this is easier said than done. Yet with God's grace, and the empowerment of God's spirit within us, we can make great strides in becoming the people, and the congregation, that God has created and called us to be.

Amen.