

What Log In My Eye?

“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
College Hill Presbyterian Church, Tulsa

Rev. Todd B. Freeman
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I'm not sure if the following story actually happened, but I know it's true. Many decades ago a young couple moved 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." 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 finally learned how to wash correctly." Her husband simply replied, "I got up early this morning and cleaned our windows."

And so it is with life. **What we see when observing others often depends on the clarity of the window or lens through which we look.** This is one of the themes in the collection of sayings in today's Gospel passage from Luke 6, the conclusion of what is known as the Sermon on the Plain – Luke's version of what is known in the Gospel of Matthew as the Sermon on the Mount.

Another theme is the conviction that **our character as a person cannot be separated from our behavior and attitude toward others.** Jesus makes the strong case that what a person *does* and *says* 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 all people with equal openness, respect and genuine hospitality, then we're really not as inclusive as we think we are.

Verses 37-42 introduce the theme of being non-judgmental and especially non-condemning 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. If we fill the role of the second blind person, needing guidance, then this is a blatant warning to **choose our leaders wisely, and that includes both our religious leaders and political leaders.** I encourage us all to think about that before casting any ballots in our city, state, and national elections this year.

Jesus follows that with a saying that reveals that a student will end up being like the teacher. So in a similar way, this is also a warning concerning whom we choose to follow. We are asked to reflect, then, upon who it is you and I learn from? Who are our

teachers and role models? **If one learns from spiritually blind, hypocritical, and judgmental teachers, then one becomes such a person. So choose your teachers carefully!**

Luke is not saying, however, that imperfections automatically disqualify a person from being a leader. That includes you and me. On the contrary, **Jesus' 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.**

In emphasizing his instructions to not judge or condemn others, Jesus tells quite a humorously exaggerated proverb in verses 41-42. It's one of my favorites in the entire Bible. Jesus draws the extravagantly 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 teach and remind us that **it is often easier to recognize faults in others than it is to acknowledge our own.** Psychologists suggest that often those things we dislike the most in *other* people tend to be our own less desirable characteristics. The brilliant psychiatrist Carl Jung called this a reflection and projection of our shadow side. **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.** We are being called to shine a spotlight at ourselves before turning it on others. In essence, Jesus calls for a vigorous program of taking an inventory of the logs lodged in our own eyes, and when necessary, to embark upon a program of log removal. Or, to use the analogy from the opening story, before pronouncing judgment on others, we need to wash our own windows through which we look upon others and the world.

Jesus uses a very strong term for those who don't - hypocrite. **I am among those who believe that hypocrisy may be the culprit inflicting the most damage to organized religion today!** One biblical commentator writes, "Looking always to others, not self, can be a beautiful veil protecting one from honest soul-searching." This is true for religious institutions as well.

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" (v. 45b). That was said best by every elementary school kid ever: **"What you say is what you are."**

Jesus then provides an agricultural analogy to emphasize his point. You will know the kind of tree by the fruit it bears. Apple trees, for instance, produce apples, thorn bushes produce other thorn bushes. The application of this analogy is that a good heart produces good thoughts and good actions, while an evil heart produces evil thoughts and evil actions. And before we start categorizing the hearts of others, let's remember that there's a bit of both – the good and the bad – in each of us.

So, does College Hill, for instance, always draw from the goodness of our heart? **Is our faith community a reflection of Jesus' teachings made visible in the world around us?**

The close of today's Gospel Reading, verses 46-49, presents 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, or to simply regurgitate Jesus' words to others without following them ourselves. This is how I personally perceive the religious fundamentalists who were out in force again this year protesting yesterday's Tulsa Pride Parade. It makes me to want to quote the first verse of today's Gospel

passage, Luke 6: 37, "Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned."

But then I wonder: **Is not my attitude and response to them also being judgmental and condemning? Am I not also part of the problem?** If nothing else it reminds me of the need to reflect harder upon the log in my own eye before trying to take the speck out of theirs, albeit a mighty huge speck. (Darn, I just did it again.) Along those lines, perhaps you've seen the following quote posted in our Fellowship Hall.

Everyone you meet is fighting a battle you know nothing about. Be kind. Always.

So yes, perhaps the key to this entire Gospel passage comes in v. 46, "**Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I tell you?**" There's really no better way to describe this teaching 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 (in other words, being obedient), and those who hear but do not act or follow through (being disobedient). The person who comes to Jesus and hears his teachings, 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 putting Jesus' teachings into practice, we gain the ability to withstand the storms that come – and yes, they will come.**

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 and bluntly, we are warned about the necessity of *responding* to the teachings of Jesus. So 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 upon?** Could it use a little reinforcement or undergirding? If so, today's biblical text should help.

To summarize (and yes we were taught in seminary never to end a sermon with the words, "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. In the process, we must be careful in our speech. And perhaps most importantly, we must be obedient in following Jesus' teachings.

Living and acting upon what Jesus taught is what defines a person, in my opinion, as a Christian – as a follower of Jesus – more than what one believes theologically about Jesus, or anything else for that matter. All this provides a wonderful and concise, though partial, description of faithful discipleship.

As we all know, of course, all this is easier said than done. But that's where God's grace comes in, and the empowerment of God's Spirit within us – helping us to make strides in becoming the people, and the congregation, that God has created and called us to be.

What log in my eye? Oh, yeah, that one.

Amen.