

Clarity of Vision: Pull the Log Out!

"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

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There was once a young couple who 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.** And we come to realize that it's easier to critique others rather than changing ourselves. It's easier to notice someone else's issues than to sit with our own. This is one of the themes in the large collection of sayings in today's Gospel passage from Luke 6.

Jesus makes the strong case that **what a person says and does inevitably stems from who a person is.** Therefore, who we are as individuals, and as a community of faith, is ultimately revealed in what we say, and especially in what we do. For instance, if we claim to be inclusive, and yet do not welcome *all* people with equal openness, respect, dignity, 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. We look within ourselves not to shame ourselves or collapse in guilt, but to begin the transformative work of healing and justice.

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. You've heard the phrase, "that's like **the blind leading the blind.**" This serves as a metaphor for when one person who needs advice and help is led by another person who doesn't have a clue. If we put ourselves into the role of the one needing guidance, then this is a **blatant warning to choose our leaders wisely, and that includes both our religious leaders and political leaders.**

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, from whom we choose to learn. We are asked to reflect upon who it is you and I learn from? Who are our teachers and role models? If one learns from spiritually blind, hypocritical, divisive, and judgmental teachers, then one also 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.** It's about being self-aware.

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 image 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.** Jesus is confronting the kind of judgmentalism that exalts one's own righteousness while condemning others. But this is not a command to ignore injustice, or to be silent in the face of harm. Rather, it is a reminder that true clarity comes from introspection. 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 upon ourselves before turning it on others. In other words, if we want clear vision, we must pull the log out!

When we do the work of seeing our own logs, it doesn't make us weaker, it makes us more compassionate. It moves us from judgment to solidarity. We stop pointing fingers and start reaching out a hand. 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 primary 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 congregations as well as entire religious institutions.

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.** To expand this to ourselves as a community of faith, 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 and among ourselves and in the world around us?

Then, in verses 46-49, we are presented with a kind of challenge. **The person who calls Jesus "Lord" must also act and 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.** Now that's hypocrisy! 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 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 our way – 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 we must ask of ourselves: **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 to never end a sermon with the words, "To summarize...") we've learned that:

- **We must be careful not to judge and condemn others.**
- **We must recognize and tend to our own flaws and faults before criticizing others about theirs.**
- **We must be careful in our speech.**
- **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. This, in part, is what describes 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 community of faith, that God has created and calls us to be.**

So if we want greater clarity of vision, let's first wash our own windows and remove our own logs.

Amen.