

St Matthias, 1030am, Rev John Beckett 19<sup>th</sup> June 2016

## Gracious living:

*'Do not judge, or you too will be judged'.*

**Matthew 7:1 to 5** and Matthew 5:1 to 8;      **Col 3:12-17**

After a while, the Baker came to suspect that the farmer from whom he bought his butter was serving short weight on his order. So for an entire week he carefully weighed the butter at home, and sure enough his suspicions were confirmed. Irate, he had the farmer arrested.

The hearing was scheduled without delay. "I assume you use the standard weights when measuring out your goods?" The judge asked the farmer sternly.

"As a matter of fact, I don't," responded the farmer calmly.

"Well, then. How do you do your measuring?"

"You see, your honour, when the Baker began buying butter from me, I decided to buy his bread" explained the farmer. "And I measure out his butter by placing his 1 pound loaf of bread on the other side of the scale."

*'Do not judge, or you too will be judged. <sup>2</sup> For in the same way as you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.*

Jesus does not mean as Norman Warren says "pretending wrong doesn't matter, or never standing up to others, or taking the easy way out of conflict...".

- Of course wrong matters
- of course we need to discern what is right and what is wrong.

even in today's reading, another part of Jesus's sermon on the Mount, Jesus still expects us to try and take the speck of sawdust out of our brother or sister's eye.

But what we are not to do is to have a censorious attitude. Being always negative about the faults of others.

And yet even with the warnings about mercy being given to those who are merciful

even with the warnings about forgiveness only being given to those who forgive –

And even with the warnings about not judging others or else risking being judged similarly harshly ourselves - that these matters of mercy and forgiveness and judging others are all closely related ..

### **We still do it!**

- How often have you been like the Baker?
- spying on neighbours to check that they used the right recycling bins, or parked sensibly!

- How often you've heard: I'm quite a patient person normally but did you know what they've just done...again!
- Someone in their position doing that?
- Judging people by their driving!?
- Judging people from their looks... We should take note of what happened about Susan Boyle and her singing
- pouring cold water on a particular person's schemes,

I suppose we should take some comfort from the fact that Jesus cannot have expected the Christian community be to be perfect or else he would not have said these words warning us against:

### **So why do we do it?**

Maybe we simply want to go with the flow and join in the gossip that everyone else's joining in with

maybe we want to look better than someone else so we find ways to do other people down by highlighting something they have done wrong

maybe, and especially so in a family or church family, and certainly in politics, we hit back simply because we are disappointed or frustrated by someone's continuing ability to do things that are wrong

maybe it's our way of getting back at someone whose has criticised us in some way - its either that or ignore them. Fight or flight. We forget that we also have the costly option of showing mercy...

**The irony is of course is as Paul says:**

*You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge another, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things.*

And as Jesus says here: <sup>3</sup> *'Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?'* <sup>4</sup> *How can you say to your brother, "Let me take the speck out of your eye," when all the time there is a plank in your own eye?'* <sup>5</sup>

It is if we have different ways of seeing:

When it comes to others, we are short-sighted. We think we see what's going on at a distance and make hazy assumptions as what's about what's going on in the detail. We have no idea about the back story of their temptations, struggles, pressures, or even whether they know what they are doing is wrong..

When it comes to ourselves we are longsighted. Bothered more about how we look at a distance to others, but not so good at looking close up in the mirror. "Mirror Mirror on the wall who's the fairest of them all" - we would be mortified if it did not reply you are.

And of course God looks on with an MRI scanner. He knows the truth about the other person and we are not their judge – He is. And he knows the truth about you and he is your judge.

Not only is this censorious condemning critical attitude an unpleasant habit to get into.

It is also enormously destructive in any community.

It's destructive in the family at home. And it is destructive in the church family community too.

It's like the bind weed which is growing all over our garden at the moment.. It chokes love and trust. All that is seen is the unwelcome weed and no longer the Christ in us.

*"Bear with each other, Paul urges us in the reading we had from Colossians. and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone."*

It's a bad habit and it's destructive but it's also ultimately dangerous for us:

*'Do not judge, or you too will be judged. <sup>2</sup> For in the same way as you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.*

John Stott writes: *the command to judge not is not a requirement to be blind, but... to renounce the presumptuous ambition to be God (by setting ourselves up as judges).*

As Paul says in Romans 2: *So when you, a mere human, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God's judgment?*

And it is secondly risky for us for while the gospel principle is indeed: blessed are the merciful for they will be shown mercy...the corollary is also uncomfortably true.

If we withhold forgiveness or mercy we risk it being withheld from us or at the very least are simply not able to receive it it is not that God's forgiveness is conditional, or dependent upon our forgiving. It's as John Stott says: *"we cannot receive the mercy and forgiveness of God unless we repent, and we cannot claim to have repented of our sins if we are unmerciful towards the sins of others"*.

So dare we ever try to take the speck of sawdust from someone else's eye ? What does Jesus really expect of us?

The bottom line is as Jesus says in St Luke's recording of this part of the Sermon on the Mount and most appropriate on this Father's Day...

<sup>36</sup> *Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.*

He expects us to be generous about the faults of others. And to think very carefully before we say anything in judgement :

*A member of a monastic order once committed a fault. A council was called to determine the punishment, but when the monks assembled it was noticed that Father Joseph was not among them. The superior sent someone to say to him, "Come, for everyone is waiting for you."*

*So Father Joseph got up and went. He took a leaking jug, filled it with water, and carried it with him. When the others saw this they asked, "What is this, father?"*

*The old man said to them, "My sins run out behind me, and I do not see them, and today I am coming to judge the error of another?"*

- Think before we judge
- Have an honest look in the mirror first.
- Repent of what you need to and thank God the Father for his mercy to you. Only then will we be less inclined to rush ahead in condemnation of others and as St Paul warns *"show contempt for the riches of God's kindness, tolerance and patience towards us"*.
- Then ask him to allow you to be similarly generous in your dealings with others and their faults.
- That can be costly, as Brother Roger of Taize writes *"forgive not in order to change the other person that's to follow Christ"*
- Leave the judging to God
- and only then, will we see clearly to take the speck from a brother or sister's eye. I suspect we may be too busy with the planks in our own.