

WHO'S JUDGING WHO?

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If you had to boil Jesus' ministry or his message down to the simplest bare roots, what would you say? What did he teach? What did he stand for? What was he about?

See, a lot of people over the last 2,000 years have kind of put their spin on what he taught, what he did, what he was about. But in your life -- in your experience -- how would you boil down his message? If you had to boil it down to two or three points, what do you think were the most important things that he taught?

For me, it comes down to three points. And of all the things that he took -- and he stood for a lot of things -- I think there are three things that shine brighter than all the rest. And for me, the first one is he taught **LOVE**. He practiced love. He showed us how to love. He stood for love. He hung out with the people that society said were unlovable. And he taught love over and over again.

The second thing he taught that was really just beyond radical, and that he taught it in so many ways, was **DON'T JUDGE**. Right? And that one's huge. And I don't think most of us even can even begin to comprehend how deeply he meant don't judge. And he taught it in so many ways: don't judge. And yet, for most of us, that seems to be so much a part of what our ego and our mind do.

You know, we have these beautiful minds that have been created. And we grew up in a school system that taught critical learning and critical thinking. And the job in critical thinking was to be able to take things apart and say which one was better and which one was best. And we got so used to using our mind in this critical analysis way that we don't actually know how to be in our own mind without that judgmental critical process always going on.

And the third thing that he taught was this idea: when we mess up on love, when we're not doing such a good job on not judging, he taught **FORGIVENESS**. He taught us to forgive. And he taught us that forgiveness was sometimes hard, and that we couldn't get it done the first time. He went on to say that we were supposed to forgive seven times 70. That's a lot of times!

Is there somebody in your life that maybe you've gotten to try to forgive him two or three times and thank you ... you wanted to tap out? That that was more than enough? *"I gave it a good shot. I tried to forgive him twice, and the old boy just keeps acting up. I tap out; I'm done!"*

So 70 times 70: that's a lot of times to stay in a process until we can get back to love! You know, and that's really hard work for us. And most of us don't really want to work that hard at doing a spiritual process, especially when the old boy doesn't deserve it. [Congregants laugh] Right? If the old boy deserved it maybe we were to work a little bit harder ... but we all know, right? He doesn't deserve it! So like, once or twice and we're done!

But Jesus kept saying things and inviting us to go deeper and to practice. And then he said crazy stuff, right? He said, *"Judge not and you will not be judged."* *"Condemn not and you will not be condemned."* *"Forgive and you will be forgiven."*

Like, I think that should be printed on every wall of every sanctuary and mosque and temple. Because I believe that is the fundamental of how we, as spiritual people, are called to live. It's this idea: Judge not, and you will not be judged. But what's the implication? Right? If you judge, by the way you judge, your life will reflect your judgment. If you condemn another ...

How many of you ever heard a minister or religious leader condemn someone that was outside their circle, saying that this person was wrong or bad or simple or going to burn in hell? Right? And these are

these are people who are supposed to represent his teaching, right? Condemning others! Well, good luck and God bless you! Right? Because the measure you give is the measure you get back. Judge not; you will not be judged. Condemn not, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.

So tonight, I want you to open your heart. Because I want you to see that, when we don't judge, it is so much easier to live with an open heart. But the moment we judge anyone or anything -- including ourselves -- at that moment that we judge anyone or anything ... at that moment our heart closes.

Now, that's a difference between a perception and a judgment. I can perceive something and keep my heart open. *"Oh, you have red hair."* Or, *"Oh, you like tacos on Tuesday."* But as soon as it becomes a judgment, I want you to see how quickly your heart locks down and it will not open in the presence of the judgment. We cannot judge another and keep our heart open. We can't even judge ourselves and keep our heart open! That, if we want to practice love, the first thing that he said -- his great commandment: that we love the Lord our God with all our mind and heart and soul, and to love our neighbor as our self -- we cannot be in judgment.

And it's like, *"What's my mind going to do for the rest of my life?"* [Congregants laugh] *"Like, what's the whole purpose of my ego if I'm not going to judge everybody and everything? Because I know what's right. And God help them if they don't."* Right?

So we stay in this place. And he invited us to transcend that place: to open our hearts; to suspend judgment. To open our hearts all the way and just allow love to flow.

And there's some great Scriptures about this! Luke 12:57-59: *"Why do you not judge for yourself what is right? As you go with your accuser before the magistrate, make every effort to settle with him on the way, lest he drag you to the judge, the judge hand you over to the officer, and the officer will put you in prison. And I tell you, you will not get out until you've paid every last copper."*

So, by the measure that you judge, you are condemned by that judgment until you've paid for every judgment that you've rendered toward yourself and others! It's just not even the judgments you place "out there." You're also condemned by the judgment that you place upon yourself!

How many of you have a favorite thing to judge about yourself that is "wrong" or "bad"? Right? And what if that is not spiritual?

See, some of us were raised with this idea that, if I judge myself first, it won't hurt so bad. Right? I'm just going to judge the heck out of myself first. And then when other people judge me, it's like, *"Yeah, so what? I already know that."* Right? But what happens is: we actually get in our own way from the infinite goodness of God.

In Matthew, it's recorded this way. *"Make friends quickly with your accuser."* Who is your accuser? Right? For most of us, our accuser is on the inside, not the outside! Our accuser is our own mind. Our accuser is our own ego telling us what's right and wrong about us.

So, make friends with your accuser when you're going with him to court, lest your accuser will hand you over to the judge, the judge to the guard, and the guard will put you in prison. And truly I say to you, you will not get out until you've paid every last penny!

There's an affirmation that I've been using lately. And the affirmation is: ***"Just like me."***

Will you say that with me? [With congregation] *"Just like me."*

One more time: [with congregation] *"Just like me."*

So, this afternoon as I was driving down 7th Street, this wonderful child of God [congregants laugh] was making a right-hand turn, right? And he was, like ... I thought he was going to stay in his own lane, right?

Which was the far-right lane. You're making a right-hand turn onto a busy street; there's cars coming; you go into the far-right lane. And I'm in the center lane, and we're going to just get along great. Well, he thought he could get a little bit out of the center lane, which I happened to think was my lane! [Congregants laugh] Right? *"This is my lane!"* Right?

And so I had a little bit of a judgment! [Congregants laugh] Right? And as I'm passing him, I noticed that - - what a surprise! - he's looking at his phone. Right? And now I want to feel so superior. [Congregants laugh] I want to feel so righteous. I want to feel so much better than that poor slob who can't get off his phone and just drive so that all of us can be safe and get home safely. Right? I want to have a royal tizzy fit!

And then there's this attitude -- this affirmation -- that pops up in my little noggin in that says, *"Just like me."* And I have to admit to myself that there are times when I drive distracted. There's times when I don't actually get over to the lane that is appropriate for me to be in. And, as much as my ego wanted to lay him out, I realize that -- by that judgment -- I will be judged by everything I do.

"Just like me."

Together: [with congregants] *"Just like me."*

So, the more that we judge, the more that we are condemned by our own thoughts. Our head closes and our soul doesn't truly open to the possibilities of God. So, what if we decide today we are going to suspend judgment?

Now, here's the point I really wanted you to hear me make today. If you don't judge ... Like, how many of you have ever been to a discount store? Like in this area, like, we've got all kinds of discount stores, right? Now, if you go into a discount store, what is the job when you walk into a discount store? You are hunting for something that is worthy of your purchase. Is that true? It's no different than going fishing or hunting. It's the same thing. You're in a store. You're trying to find something that the sleeves are both the same length, and actually fits you and -- right? -- you know, that looks like it'll last more than twice through the washing machine. You're trying to find a deal, and you're hunting for your deal. And you're judging everything! You're literally judging everything at warp speed.

If you've ever watched somebody who lives, or is very good at discount stores, they can go through a rack of clothes [pantomimes sifting through a rack of clothes] at just a staggering pace. [Congregants laugh] Staggering! And they actually know what day the new stuff arrives, because you don't want to miss a deal. Right?

So, their little judger is going on 90 miles an hour. And what I want you to see is that many of us are living life just like that! We are looking at everything in our life, judging it, and deciding what we're going to let in and what we're going to keep out. And frankly, it's exhausting! Because we keep trying to decide what we're going to let into our life and what we're going to try to keep out.

And what if, tonight, you just decide that you're going to suspend your judgment and just move into a state of complete receptivity? What if, tonight, you decide that you no longer want to live based on your own judgments? And you're just going to live wide open?

Can you imagine being that vulnerable? But also being that free? That you no longer need to judge life and judge everything in it. You just decide that God is in charge and that you are wide open, ready to receive all the good that God has for you.

See, many of us have been living from our ego for so long, we don't even understand that there could be another way! We think we're just fine-tuning our judgment so that our judgment gets better and better and better so that we can actually spot the good deal at 90 miles an hour.

But what if you just literally stop judging? And just say to life -- just say to God -- *"I am wide open and I'm ready to receive."* Can you imagine that God could bless you there? That you could actually trust the universe only to bring good -- and very good -- into your life? That you could be that open, that receptive, that blessed, and allow life to come at you from with a wide open heart that you don't have to judge anything?

One of my favorite little books is the book, *Illusions*, by Richard Bach that came out in the 70s. And usually every summer I read this little book, because I love it. You know, it takes me about an hour, an hour-and-a-half to read this little book. I get a couple cries throughout the whole book. The ending always gets me: it inspires me; it makes me think. And it's just a lovely little book. There's one little section I want to read for you:

The master answered and said: Once there lived a village of creatures along the bottom of a great crystal river. The current of the river swept silently over them all - young and old, rich and poor, good and evil, the current going its own way, knowing only its own crystal self.

Each creature in its own manner clung tightly to the twigs and rocks at the river bottom, for clinging was their way of life, and resisting the current what each had learned from birth.

But one creature said at last, 'I am tired of clinging. Though I cannot see it with my eyes, I trust that the current knows where it is going. I shall let go, and let it take me where it will. Clinging, I shall die of boredom.'

The other creatures laughed and said, 'Fool! Let go, and that current you worship will throw you tumbled and smashed across the rocks, and you shall die quicker than of boredom!'

But the one heeded them not, and taking a breath did let go, and at once was tumbled and smashed by the current across the rocks. Yet in time, as the creature refused to cling again, the current lifted him free from the bottom, and he was bruised and hurt no more.

And the creatures downstream, to whom he was a stranger, cried, 'See a miracle! A creature like ourselves, yet he flies! See the Messiah, come to save us all!'

And the one carried in the current said, 'I am no more Messiah than you. The river delights to lift us free, if only we dare let go. Our true work is this voyage, this adventure.'

But they cried the more, 'Saviour!' all the while clinging to the rocks, and when they looked again he was gone, and they were left alone making legends of a Saviour.

And it came to pass when he saw that the multitude thronged him the more day on day, righter and closer and fiercer than ever they had, when he say that they pressed him to heal them without rest, and feed them always with his miracles."

So here's the story. What if Jesus knew what he was talking about? Could be! And what if your spiritual life could be boiled down to three things that are not small things -- that are profound things; that are important things; that are transformative things -- but three things? What if your spiritual life could be boiled down to three things that you did day in and day out over and over and over again? And the act of doing these three things lifted you out of whatever bondage and pain and suffering that you've known in your life, and would lift you into a higher level of good that you can even imagine now?

And those three things are **LOVE**. You just love! Not because it's easy; not because it makes sense; not because the other person deserves it. But you just love because you love; that's your nature -- is to love. You were created in love; it's your superpower! Your job is to love.

And if you're really committed to love, then **YOU CAN'T JUDGE** anyone or anything, including yourself. Because the moment you judge them, you stop loving them. And so your job in every moment of every day is just to love without judgment.

And it's like, *"Well, Richard, that's too scary. What if they don't deserve it? What if they don't love me back? What if they don't do it right? I'm going to be so vulnerable."* Yes! You love without judgment.

And when you mess up those two, you **FORGIVE**. When somebody else messes up those two, you forgive.

And you go back to these three things over and over and over again. It's like a little roadmap. What do I do today? Oh, you love. You love; you don't judge; and when you mess up, you forgive. And it could not be simpler.

And it couldn't be any harder. Because we want to judge. There's times when we want to close our hearts. There's times when we want everybody to know how stupid they are. And in those moments, we forgive and we go back to loving without judgment. And when we can't do it, we forgive. Over and over and over again.

Will you pray with me?

And I invite you to open your mind, your heart, your soul to this activity tonight. Like, who would I really be if I just loved? If love really was my superpower? If love was the only thing?

And who would I be if I didn't judge myself or others or the moment or the situation? And I just lived wide open, ready to receive all the good that God is?

And what if when I fall or I make a mistake or I don't do it well, I just forgive myself? Or I forgive others and I forgive in the moment?

And then I go back. I start over. I love. I don't judge. And when I fall, I forgive. And what if my life could be that simple? That it really was just about loving without judgment? Loving without judgment: everyone, including ourselves.

In the name and through the power of the living Christ, we give thanks. And so it is. Amen.

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