

Rev. Dr. Anne Bain Epling
Faith Des Peres Presbyterian Church
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Luke 6:39-49

“Logs and Specks”

If you were here last week you might recall that our gospel story was about a demon possessed man, named Legion, who had come to believe that everything his worst critics said about him, was true. I then went on to say that, like Legion, we too tend to believe what our worst critics say about us (that we're . . .). Yet against all the voices of our critics stands the still, small, but mighty voice of God, who crosses oceans and boundaries to tell us we are loved and every bit worthy of experiencing and feeling God's love *no matter who we are or what we have done*.

This week, we're exploring the person who is the polar opposite of Legion. This is the person who can't see his or her own faults but has no problem pointing out someone else's faults. This person may be your worst critic, or your neighbor, or maybe even a friend or family member, who passes judgment on others but never looks critically at him or herself. This person sees the speck in your eye, but somehow misses the log in his or her own. Which is a pretty funny hyperbole of Jesus' when you think about it. After all, how can someone have a log in one's eye and *not notice it!* But there are people like that; we all know them. Right? I don't know about you, but those sorts of people drive me crazy with their self-righteous attitudes and “perfect” lives. They like to build themselves up by knocking others' down.

I believe the name for such a person is hypocrite. Hypocrites like to appear as if they're helping . . .”here, let me get that speck out of your eye” . . .when actually they're trying to feel better about themselves.

Sometimes we know them when we see them. An extreme example is Westboro Baptist Church. They just love to pass judgment on others. Hypocrites like that aren't hard to miss. But sometimes we miss them at first. They come off as so helpful and so kind that we miss the judgment they're making about us.

And sometimes, if we're honest, we are the person with the log in the eye. Which I realize is not something we like to think about, and believe me, this is in no way meant to be finger-wagging moment. Trust me, I've had plenty of logs in my eyes. Still do, no doubt.

But along comes Jesus who likes to remind us: "Take the log out of your eye. And keep your grubby fingers out of other people's eyes, until you deal with your own blind spots."

It reminds me of the Peanuts cartoon when Snoopy was sitting on the roof of his dog house. Charlie Brown comes up and says, "I hear you're writing a book on theology. I hope you have a good title." Snoopy replied, "I have the perfect title." Then he leaned

over his typewriter and typed, "Has It Ever Occurred to You That You Might Be Wrong?"

That's the question to ask ourselves if we are ever going to get rid of the lumber yard in our own eyelashes. Jesus uses this ridiculous image to make his point. All of us have no problem turning to another person and seeing their faults. All of us have a lot of problems owning up to our own shortcomings and faults. So much so that it's difficult to get a proper perspective.

Now, in order to understand why Jesus is throwing this zinger at us, we need to know where he's coming from. So back up a few verses, to the beginning of chapter 6, where Jesus starts preaching his sermon on the plain, or what Matthew refers to as the Sermon on the Mount. His sermon sums up everything his followers-that would be us-should and should not do. He tells us to love our enemies, he tells us who will be blessed and who will not, and he tells us not judge others. But then, because Jesus is a realist and knows no one is perfect, he tells us to act with integrity. "You cannot lead a blind person if you yourself are blind, he says. You need to have a good heart if you're going to produce good fruit. And for goodness sake, attend to your own faults before pointing out someone else's."

It's all such commonsense advice that, truth be told, we tend to forget it, and forget that we don't need to be perfect, Christ doesn't ask for perfect, but we do need to have integrity, and Christ does expect us to show mercy. "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful," Jesus says right from the beginning. He may as well have said, "This is the hallmark Christian ethic, to know you are not above reproach, and to show mercy to others."

A failure on the part of the church or his followers to do this will, he says, result in ruin. "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 the house."

Here in St. Louis, we know something about rivers bursting and floods ruining houses. And all of us have seen the devastating pictures come out of CO and the terrible ruin those floods have created. Real floods are horrific, and in no way should we interpret those floods to be some sort of punishment from God.

But Jesus' metaphor is a powerful one because floods are horrific, and is a warning for all of us who declare Jesus Lord, but whose actions speak otherwise.

Now on Friday morning, just as I was thinking about this sermon and drinking my coffee, along comes Pope Francis with the best sermon illustration I could ever ask for! Someone once said these sorts of news stories are, for preachers, faxes from God. I think today we would call them texts from God, but no matter . . .

Along comes the Pope who makes headlines for basically saying the church should be about compassion instead of condemnation, and that the church needs to show more mercy, and less judgment.

"The church sometimes has locked itself up in small things, in small-minded rules," he lamented. "The most important thing is the first proclamation: Jesus Christ has saved you. And the ministers of the church must be ministers of mercy above all."

He made headlines for saying this!!

Friends, it's a sad day when the Church of Jesus Christ makes headlines for stating the obvious because the obvious isn't so obvious anymore. You know what I'm saying?

And it's not only the Catholics who make judgment calls. The Presbyterians do it, too. There are so many news stories about hypocritical Christians, or hypocritical churches, who see the speck, but not the log. There are so many that when the Pope states that the church's business is to be merciful instead of judgmental, it makes the news.

The theologian Reinhold Niebuhr once said about nations, but it can also be said of churches, "nations will always find it more difficult than individuals to behold the beam that is in their own eye while they observe the mote that is in their brother's eye." It's unfortunate that churches are known more these days for the judgment they render than the mercy they show.

But along comes Jesus who reminds us that none of us have 20-20 vision, and that one of the primary threats to discipleship is our inclination to judge others. But we don't get better by comparing ourselves with someone else. It's impossible to lift ourselves up by bringing others down. And, lip service Christians masquerading as reliable guides are a serious danger to the church, because one bad apple really can ruin the bunch. As Jesus said, bad trees produce bad fruit. It is much better to acknowledge, detect and correct your own faults than to pretend you don't have any. Even the Pope, when asked by the interviewer, "Who is Jorge Mario Bergolio?" - Francis's name before he was elected pope, said: "I am a sinner. This is the most accurate definition. It is not a figure of speech, a literary genre. I am a sinner."

I want to close with a short story that, ironically, happened this past week that involves my dog Baby, and her eye. She's had this funny thing going on with her right eye that I chalked up to a scratch or something that poked her in the yard. It's been there for a couple of months, but it doesn't bother her in the slightest.

On Monday I took her to the vet for her annual vaccinations and pointed out the eye to the vet. After looking at it, she said, "Um, that's a tumor. She needs to see an ophthalmologist." Dumb me said, "A dog ophthalmologist?" Who knew there were canine ophthalmologists? When she pulled her eyelid down, I could see it was a growth of some kind.

So off we went. The eye doctor turned off all the lights in the exam room and put on the biggest bifocal/magnifying glasses/lenses I've ever seen, and then got out another magnifying glass and a flashlight to look closely into baby's eyes. If it had been a telescope, he could have seen Pluto, I kid you not.

After closely examining her, he assured me it was a benign tumor, and he could freeze it off in 10-15 minutes, and she'd be good to go.

So that's what we did. And Baby is doing fine.

Friends, the metaphor is a simple one, but is worth stating, that in order to see our own faults, we need to look deeply into our own hearts, with really big magnifying glasses, and even a flashlight, so we are aware of our own logs. I know that's hard, and sometimes we claw and scratch or even tuck our tails between our legs to avoid it, but it's a necessary part of being a Christian. And when we find the logs, we need to pull them out, or freeze them off, because only then can we be of assistance to others in removing theirs. And not in a judgmental way, but in a way that is compassionate and merciful . . .and is hopefully so commonplace, that it's not even newsworthy.

Amen.

Lection

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