

Introduction

Check-in & Introductions

Love the Sinner, Hate the Sin

Gospel Lesson

Matthew 7:1-5 (NRSV)

¹ "Do not judge, so that you may not be judged. ² For with the judgment you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. ³ Why do you see the speck in your neighbor's eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye? ⁴ Or how can you say to your neighbor, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' while the log is in your own eye? ⁵ You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor's eye.

Bible/Sermon Focus

Separation from goodness, from friends, from love, or from health is difficult. Separation is one of those human experiences that can just tear us apart inside as we are torn apart from the outside. Loneliness, doubt, anxiety, it's all part of separation.

If we define sin as separation from God, we are talking about a break, a split from that which reminds us that we are good, that we are loved, that we have value, and that we matter. We are also talking about a split from that which reminds us that others are good, that they too are loved and that they too, matter. Separation from God is a debilitating and difficult place. It obscures our sense of God and as a result obscures our sense of self and self-worth. It obscures our view of other people and God's divine love for us strange creatures.

Being separated from God is not how we are created. God sent Jesus into the world so that we may learn and recognize that the end goal, what God wants for us, is a world where we love each other, where we love ourselves. A world where we love God. It is in that space that we are whole.

But we all know it doesn't always feel like that. Everyone has those days where they feel cut off from the world. And everyone has days where they wish more deeply than ever to be reconciled to community and the world and to God. Everyone bleeds and everyone is struggling. So, we try our best to follow the words of Christ when he says, "Do not judge." Because it will again, sometime soon, be our turn to feel cut off. It will again be our turn to struggle with sin. It will be our turn to be alone. It will be our turn to be condemned by our neighbor. We pour out condemnation over each other more than we would like to admit. More than we should. And we do this while knowing that we all want to feel the love of God.

Jesus came to teach us what that could look like, what the reign of God looks like. And it looks like a space of reconciled community and relationships. It looks like a space of grace and forgiveness. It looks like a life where we do not condemn each other. It looks like ...

"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. We all have logs in our eyes. We have no right to declare anyone beyond God's mercy. Love the sinner. Period."

Discussion Questions

1. When was the first time you heard the phrase, "Love the sinner, hate the sin."?
2. How do you define sin?
3. Reflect on the following quote from Susannah Wesley, *"If you would judge of the lawfulness or the unlawfulness of pleasure, then take this simple rule: Whatever weakens your reason, impairs the tenderness of your conscience, obscures your sense of God, and takes off the relish of spiritual things - that to you is sin, no matter how innocent it may seem in itself."*
4. Reflect on this quote from Dr. Warren Cater, *"The command forbids the arrogance of denying mercy, even dignity, to another. Followers of Jesus have no right to declare someone is beyond God's mercy."* Do you agree or disagree?

Prayer

God of Love, you remind us that we are valuable, and that so is everyone else. We ask for humbleness to wash over us. We pray that we be better to our neighbors every day moving forward. We pray that we live in the midst of your reign. Teach us to love better, to love more, and to condemn less. God, we thank you for Jesus who shows us how to calm the murderous crowds of the world, and the destructive voices in our psyches. Remind us, Lord of our worth. Amen.

*No, the Bible doesn't say, "Hate the sin but love the sinner." You know what it does say?
Love the sinner. Period.*