Sunday Oct. 15, 1978

"JUDGE NOT!" Matthew 7:1-12

Introduction

In our scripture lesson for this morning we read from the Sermon on the Mount, the words of Jesus--"Judge not that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?"

Well, what about this matter of judging? To begin with, we need to note the meaning of the word "judge," as used here. Jesus did not mean that we are not to have an opinion about things, or that we are not to judge between right and wrong. Nor did he mean that we are not to make choices. We all need to make judgments as to which course of action is the best to take. We need to make judgments as to which item to purchase; as to which better suits our purpose. In many areas of life, judgments of all kinds are necessary.

And we all like to make judgments. Actually gossip is a mass of verdicts on our neighbor's conduct and who among us does not talk about our neighbors? Politics, national and international is considerably concerned with judgments. These are inevitable. We make appraisals of situations all the time before we act. We have to make ethical judgments and who can remain silent in the face of flagrant wrong? We are to speak out in such situations as did the prophets of old.

And Jesus here is not saying that we should not have law-courts and professional judges. Such courts are a vital necessity in our everyday affairs. We need referrees and umpires in many aspects of our living.

In our text for this morning, Jesus is referring to a particular kind of judging. The Greek word in our text means to censure or condemn. It is this kind of judging, the kind of personal condemnation and fault-finding in regard to persons that Jesus is talking about. Jesus draws a line between ethical appraisal and derogatory, sharp-tongued criticism.

We know what Jesus is talking about for we all know how easy it is for us to find fault with someone else--how easy

it is to see the speck in our brother's eye and how hard it is to see the log in our own eye.

But why did Jesus warn us so strongly against this kind of fault-finding judging?

1. First of all, Jesus spoke against this kind of judging because he knew that as human beings, our judgments of others are always only partial--that is, we can never know all there is to know about another person which means that our fault-finding is necessarily based on incomplete information.

For example, we can never completely know or understand our neighbor's motives. And thus so often we completely mis-judge a person's motive and do harm to them and to ourselves.

Psychiatry has taught us that even a skilled psycho-therapist must spend hours and hours and hours in an attempt to even begin to help a person understand his own motives. So how do we think that we can possibly understand and judge a person's motivations when he does not even understand them himself? Thus all of our judgments are false to a large degree. And so many of our fault-finding condemnations are harsh and completely miss the point. We like to jump to quick conclusions about another person's actions.

George Buttrick gives an example. Years ago a captain was rescued from a doomed submarine and eyebrows were lifted. People were aghast that a captain would use the safety hatch and leave the crew to their fate. But later it was discovered that he was in reality not the captain at all, but an observer for the construction company on the ship's trial voyage. The man had volunteered to go to the surface fifteen miles from shore with messages tied to his wrists in the likelihood that he would drown. And so it goes many times. None of us know enough to act as censors. And yet we are so quick to find fault and condemn without looking for the reasons. We like to believe what we want to believe, ~~and~~ we like to believe the worst about people. → add story

Most of our judgments are superficial. ~~and most of them over-simplify the complexity of motivation, the complexity of moral conflict in this world~~.

Thus Jesus warns us not to find-fault or condemn because we can never know completely another person's motivations.

2. Secondly, Jesus warns us against this kind of condemning judgment and fault-finding in others because in so doing we actually hide our own faults from ourselves and build ourselves up at the expense of pushing others down. What we are really doing many times is placing our own faults which we refuse to see or recognize, on others. Again we are fooling ourselves.

Thus if I call someone lazy, I am confessing that I know what laziness means. How do I know? Because I myself am lazy. But I ordinarily do not admit this to myself and my quick fault-finding judgment may actually help me hide my own short-comings from myself. Thus it is that our censure is most often directed to the fault in others that is first in us--a fault that we do not want to admit is deep within us. By transfer we blame the other person in order to escape the realities of self-blame.

Ah but how flattering it is to our pride to be able to dispense condemnation to our brothers, for by inference, in condemning him we are commending ourselves. When we say how bad he is, we really mean, how good I am!

How easy it is to confess the faults of others! E. Stanley Jones tells how once a student came to him and told him of new society they had formed. "The society for the confession of sins." He was interested in such a novel society and suggested that it must be very difficult to confess their sins to each other in this way. "Oh, no," replied the youth, "we don't confess our own sins, but other people's sins!" The society for the confession of other people's sins has a very large and I fear a growing membership throughout the world. But Jesus was saying here that no Christian can belong to it.

Since, however, as we said a moment ago, that the faults we like to so easily find in others are usually the faults within ourselves, we might try this little experiment in our own lives. This week, note particularly those faults which you are most quick to condemn in others and then look deeply and honestly at yourself. Each one of us will learn a great deal about ourselves.

3. Thirdly, Jesus warns us against judging others in our usual fault-finding condemning way because such action only breeds more condemnation of one another. Jesus said, "for with the judgment you pronounce, you will be judged and the measure you give will be the measure you get. Our condemnation only breeds more condemnation and it will soon turn

back directly on us. And then we have caused others to be the same kind of fault-finding people that we are. Soon it spreads. On the other hand if we are friendly and positive, we will find that this too will spread. The measure you give will be the measure you get. Many people who claim that people are always finding fault with them have in reality caused it in the beginning themselves.

Frank Laubach, the Apostle of Literacy, points out in his teaching how important it is not to find fault, but to be friendly and positive and how this helps to win persons for Jesus Christ. Here are some of his rules for the teacher who is teaching illiterate non-Christians. Never frown, Never look disapproval or disappointment. Never scold, Never Yawn! Never say no! Cut "no" out of your vocabulary. Never shake your head no. In fact, don't shake your head at all. Treat your student like a king, not like an illiterate! Laubach's method has worked. Millions have been taught to read and write throughout the world. But if the teachers had worked with a judgmental, fault-find attitude, it would not have been accomplished.

4. Fourthly, Jesus warns us against fault-finding judgment of others because nothing at all is accomplished by it. Have you ever asked yourself this simple question: "What good actually does my condemnation of another person accomplish? Does it make that person better? Does it change the situation? Does it contribute something to the world? The next time you are ready to condemn someone with a judgmental attitude, ask yourself these questions.

In reality, we will probably find that our judgments usually only bring more harm to others and finally to ourselves. If I habitually take the attitude of harping crriticism, then some day when life demands of me a positive contribution I will find that I have none to make. We might call this the power of negative acting.

But there are even more reasons and deeper ones which caused Jesus to warn us against being judges.

Jesus is reminding us that man's basic role is not that of a judge of his fellow man. This whole business of condemnation and judging other people's motivations is a perversion and denial of human nature.

It is a denial of human nature because, as we noted before it causes ruptures in human relationships. It doesn't

increase among men the love of God and neighbor. If I say to my friend, or to anyone for that matter, "You are always bragging and making a fool of yourself," I may well be speaking the truth and sometimes I may get away with such a statement providing our friendship is strong enough to take it. But more than likely if I am too hyper-critical in an insensitive way, the censure may break the relationship. It does so because my harsh intemperate judgment of that persons actually rejects the person.

But even more than that, our judging and condemning of others can separate us from God. For when we judge in the manner that we have been talking about all through this sermon, we usurp the role and place of God. After all, it is God and God alone who can read men's thoughts and motives completely. We become judgmental, we pose as God and soon we begin to believe that our judgments are as righteous as God's. We even begin to believe that we know better than God what is good and what is evil. And it is the essence of human sin for man to boast of the power to discern ultimately what is good and evil. This was the basic sin and temptation in the garden of Eden in the story in Genesis. Adam and Eve were tempted to eat of the tree of life because then they thought they would be like God and could know as well as Him the difference between good and evil. But in reality, our judgments are always only partially correct. Our judgements are always biased and influenced by self-interest.

Finally, of course we make poor judges because as the Bible reminds us, we have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. And when someone else gets into trouble, we are in reality a part of that trouble. This is what Jesus was indicating in the story in the Gospel of John about the woman caught in adultery. You remember those around her were about to stone her to death. Jesus said, "Let the person who is without sin cast the first stone." And when those around heard that, they all went away.

What then is our role in life. To put it most simply, we are to live as God's children. We are to see ourselves as brothers and sisters with everyone else in the world. Their sin is our sin, their guilt is our guilt. We are God's children living in the midst of the baffling ambiguities of moral life and we need to know that we are always tempted to make ourselves the center of the world.

However the good news of the Gospel is that God through his self-disclosure in Jesus Christ has given us an example by which we may appraise our conduct. We can look at Jesus and then look at ourselves. However it is not up to us to take another person and measure him against Jesus. We can point him to Jesus--we can tell him about God's good news.

Thus it is. We are all God's children, some ofus are unruly, some cruel. All of us are aspiring and we are all dependent on God's grace. Furthermore we are members of one family and we are strive to honor and keep the family bond in family love.

Our text reminds us that the earth is not a law court and that we are not God's prosecuting attorneys. God is our judge and our prosecuting attorney and God is the judge of others as well. And remember that when God judges there are always some surprises. We may find that the persons we thought were the worst come out the best.

Each one of us must decide if this world is going to be a courtroom or a home; if we are going to go through life acting like a prosecuting attorney or as a member of God's family.