

Saved By Grace Lutheran Church
Sermon by Pastor Tim Bartels

Trinity 4, 2013
Luke 6:36-42ⁱ

Part I

A judge is someone who renders a decision. He renders a decision about the rightness or wrongness of a matter; whether a thing is good or bad. We have become acquainted with judges from television shows. Judge Judy, Judge Joe Brown and The Peoples Court are some examples from recent years. In them, whether real or staged, a plaintiff and a defendant stand before the judge. Each one argues his or her case. The judge then renders a decision.

Judges are not the only ones called to do so. Consider these common examples. An employer is called to judge. He has to judge the character and skill sets of potential employees for hiring. He has to judge the employee's performance on the basis of merit. If you are a citizen old enough to vote, you are called to judge. You do that by judging candidates' platforms. Then you cast a vote for the one you feel will best lead. If you are a family member, you are called to judge. Parents, for example, do that every day. You judge your children's behavior with an effort to improve them. Christians are called to judge. You are called to test the spirits.ⁱⁱ That means you are to examine the teachings in the world on

the basis of God's word. You are to do so, so that you are not deceived by the devil.

The point of all this is that there are vocations, then where your God-given responsibility *is* to judge. So, why does Jesus say, "Judge not; condemn not?" He means, as someone said, that you are not to put yourself above others or to read evil motives into their hearts.ⁱⁱⁱ That's the bad kind of judging.

Part II

...and that's where we run into trouble. We run into trouble when we, as the catechism puts it, put the worst construction on another's actions.^{iv} That is, we automatically think the worst. We think we know the motives of others. We render decisions, *before* we give them a chance to explain their actions.

It reminds me of a story about a British family that was on vacation in South Africa. They loved it so much that they decided to stay and open up a game park. One day, the wife's mother suddenly showed up for a visit. Right from the start she was pushy. Her pushiness grated on the viewers nerves. As a viewer I did not like her. I formed a judgment about her. I read evil motives into her heart. I thought she didn't care for her family, just herself.

What the viewer like myself didn't know, at that time, is *why* she was that way. Earlier in life she had been abandoned by her husband. So her pushiness wasn't that

her motives were evil per se, but it was *how* she learned to cope with that abandonment. Before that information, though, the viewer typically forms a bad judgment.

How often don't we do that in life? We *jump* to conclusions before we know the whole story. We think we *know* what the other is up to. We think we can *read* hearts. When we do, we "look at the speck in our brother's eye." A speck is a relatively small item. It's not easy to spot. It might be on the edge of an eyelid. It might be a floater on the eyeball. It might be sleep on the eye. Small as it is, we obsess over it. It's how it is when we read evil motives into the hearts of others.

Once we have made such a judgment, the next step is to condemn. To condemn is to consign another to some form of punishment. The punishment is meant to make right a wrong.

That reminds me, again, of the family we left in Africa. If you remember, the grandmother's character was made to grate on the viewer's nerves. Until the viewer was given the information about her unfortunate past, she was unwanted. So, as I watched the show, I found myself saying out loud, "I hope they don't keep her around." Because I had judged her to be a bad character, without knowing her past, I condemned her. I wanted her off the show.

It's the same thing we do when we judge. After we judge, we condemn. We condemn the other to some punishment. We give them the cold shoulder; give them

the silent treatment. We keep a record of wrongs; keep score, as they say. We give them pay back; hold their feet to the fire. We speak about them; what they did to get under our skin. We take offense; feel we have to put them down to prop ourselves up. We do it, even though we don't know their motives; can't see their hearts. Once we have talked behind their backs, though, we can *never* take back what we said. Their reputation is hurt.

Having said that, that there are times that we might need to talk to another about a hurtful situation. We might need to, to get counsel on what to do about it. That is to be done in confidence, though, in order to seek a god-pleasing resolution.

Apart from seeking this counsel, though, we often find ourselves condemning our neighbor. It's as though we shackle him with our condemnatory words; as though we put him behind bars by our incriminating words.

Part III

All this is to put them under the microscope of the law. It is to obsess over the faults of our neighbor; over the speck in their eye. We get so wrapped up in their sins, that "we can't see the log in our own eye." That's the thing about judging. Our sin of judging is shortsighted. It makes us appear to be self-righteous; give us the appearance of being holier than thou. Yet, at the *same time* our neighbor sees the log in our eye. That is, our

hypocritical self righteous pride stands out because we do the *same* sins we judge others for.

To say it another way, to put our neighbor under the law is to put self under the law; to judge them on the basis of the law is to judge self on the basis of the law. It all goes to say, what goes around comes around. Jesus put it this way, “With the same measure you use, it will be measured back to you.”

That, in the end, leaves us with nothing to stand upon. Consider what the apostle says about standing on the law. “All who have sinned *under* the law will be judged *by* the law. The law has charged *all* under sin that *every* mouth may be stopped; that the *whole world* may be held accountable before God.^v”

That is the law. The law judges us guilty as charged. Guilty as charged, the law then condemns us. It locks us up; holds our feet to the fire. It throws us behind hell’s bars, locks the bars, and puts the key out of reach. It is the punishment we merit for our sins of judging and condemning. The apostle sums it up, “Judgment is *without mercy* to the one who has *shown* no mercy.^{vi}”

Part IV

That’s what we merit. The amazing thing, though, is that what we merit is *not* what we get. Instead of judging and condemning us, God in Christ shows us mercy. Mercy means that God saw you in trouble. He saw you judged guilty of sin; condemned and put behind hell’s

bars. God not only saw, God had empathy. God felt for you. Not only did he feel for you, he did something about it. He went about breaking you free.

That's mercy and that is what God did. God did it by putting himself under the law. He did when he took your sin of judging and condemning. He took it upon himself. When he did, the law rendered its decision. It found Jesus guilty – not with his sin – but with your sin. Found guilty as charged, the law condemned Jesus. It locked him up; threw him behind hell's bars; took your place in hell; was condemned for you.

It is precisely because Jesus did this for you that God sets you free. The bars that slammed you into hell have been unlocked. The law that shackled your feet to hell's walls is shattered. It is because Jesus took your place. You are forgiven! Forgiven, God doesn't bring up old wounds; doesn't keep score; doesn't get even. To be sure, he could. He has every right to. He has every right to judge according to the law. He could, but he doesn't.

He doesn't because he shows you mercy. He shows it to you, "good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over." That is to say, God's mercy in your life is overflowing. It more than covers your sins.

V

To know this mercy spells "Relief." It is a relief to be set free and not condemned. It is a relief to be judged forgiven and not judged guilty. It is why Jesus calls you

to show mercy. The very same relief God's mercy has given you he wants for your neighbor.

We said at the outset that some vocations *do* call for us to judge. Employers have to make judgments with employees. Citizens have to make judgments on candidates when they vote. Christians are to judge the beliefs and philosophies of the world on the basis of God's word. Family members have to make judgments over family matters. The father in the African family had to make a judgment for the well being of his family that was torn apart. Initially he was going to send the mother back home, but that judgment changed after he had all the information. That's the kind of judging God calls us to do in our various vocations.

What we have not been called to do is to judge the motives of another. While we may have to judge facts in our various callings, we are not to read evil motives into hearts. Rather than judge motives, God calls us to show mercy. He calls us to show mercy because God in Christ has been merciful to us. Mercy, not judgment, gives the sinner heaven. After all, mercy gives you - the sinner - heaven.

Today, the church's liturgy teaches you to plead to the Lord for that mercy. It does so as you approach the altar. In just a few moments, after the words Jesus gave us to speak over the bread and wine are spoken, he will be present on this altar. He will be present with his body and blood in the bread and the wine. We poor sinners

can't approach this altar because of any merit of our own. We can't because we are unworthy sinners. So, we unworthy sinners are taught to sing, "O Christ, the Lamb of God, *have mercy upon us.*"

...and God does. Instead of keeping record; instead of giving you payback; instead of turning you a cold shoulder, Jesus tenderly puts his body and blood on your lips. By doing that in mercy he takes away all your sin. No longer are you judged to be guilty; condemned to hell. No. You aren't. You aren't because, "There is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.^{vii}" What a relief! It is a relief, because "Mercy triumphs over judgment!^{viii}" Amen!

ⁱ Citations to the text (NKJV) will not be cited in the sermon

ⁱⁱ I John 4.1

ⁱⁱⁱ *What in the World Is Going On?* David Thompson, p. 6

^{iv} Luther's Small Catechism, Explanation of the 8th Commandment

^v Combination of Romans 2.13, 3.9, 19; ESV

^{vi} James 2.13

^{vii} Romans 8.1

^{viii} James 2.13