

Proper 6 C
St. Luke 7:36-8:3
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St. George's Bolton
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The Sword of Judgment

"As she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them. When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is—that she is a sinner."

What kind of woman she is...!!!

Didn't your mother tell you not to associate with people like her? Imagine what people will think about you if you do! Never mind that, imagine how you might be misled by her! You will become the like the people you hang out with: sinners, failures and miscreants.

When I was a little boy, my mother warned me not to hang out with *most* of the children in my neighborhood. She called them gutter-snipes, largely because they played with their toy trucks in the sand that had collected in the gutter. "Dogs go to the bathroom there, and it is filthy," she would say. "Don't associate with them," she would say. She left the implication that these kids were horrible people to hang out with, dangerous people who would grow up to be criminals. In fact, one grew up to be a civil engineer, another owns his own oil delivery service, and another became a school teacher, and the other one became a captain of detectives in the police department. She never mentioned that it might be dangerous for kids to play there by the side of the road,

but then no one ever got hurt playing there on my street. And so I played by myself in my own backyard, in my own dirt pile, and I had only one other friend who was not part of the gutter-snipe gang. Don't know what happened to him, after we moved away. Surely, I did not come under the undue influence of the gutter-snipes. Was I any better the person for it? We will never know. In hindsight, it seems rather silly. But I can never forget the gutter-snipes when I hear this story in Luke.

So, what kind of person am I? What kind of person are you? Are we the product of our associations, or are our choices the consequence of our true character?

It is so easy to point the sharp sword of judgment at others! And it feels good when we do it too. But are you free of the spot of sin? Have you ever failed at something in life that you are embarrassed about? Haven't you done or said something you wish you could go and take back? Indeed, who are we to judge others?

Judge not, lest ye be judged. Luke 6:37 says, *"Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven."* You have a judge, and that judge is in heaven. So why do we continue to judge?

It is so tempting to judge others. When we find the fault in someone else, it makes us feel like better, bigger people. *'We would never do that! How stupid! How morally bankrupt! I am so much better than that!'* This is why the scandal rags in the grocery store are so popular. We love to read about the misfortunes and failings of others, even if they are so exaggerated. Reading these brings our super heroes who once dwelled in the stratosphere down to our size, and maybe below and beneath us. They prove no one is supper human. They are

people just like us, and well, maybe not even as good as us. No matter that they are famous! And so we pick up the latest National Inquirer to read about how Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie are going to break up their marriage. Hey they split up just like me.

(There, but for the Grace of God, go I.) Somewhere, if we are of a healthy character and mindset, humility should kick in. Rather than seeing ourselves as better than others, we should at least realize the human condition makes us all alike, despite our success or fame, or lack thereof. When we sit smugly in judgment others, we do so at our own peril because we will soon join them in their human foibles. It is simply unavoidable. To err is human.

Then there is guilt by association. Once you have been publically shamed for something, no one wants to know you or associate with you. Your friends literally evaporate and disappear. Fair-weather friends these are, you might say, in a situation like this, you find out who your real friends are, whom you can count on. Real friends won't desert you. They will love and be with you, no matter what.

The Apostle James warns us in his Epistle: [4:11] *"Brothers and sisters, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against a brother or sister or judges them speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it."* In the RSV translation it says you are not a doer of the law. Doers of the law busy themselves keeping the law, not attempting to judge others. Slander implies an untruth is told about the other. The untruth is that we are not better than anyone else. There, but for the Grace of God, go I.

You have a judge in heaven, and God is our judge. John implies this is his Gospel when he says, [12:48] *"The one who rejects me and does not receive my word has a judge; on the last day the word that I have spoken will serve as judge..."* The words God has spoken to us will one day be the measure by which we are judged. And the measure of us is the words of the law of love, the greatest of the commandments which sum up and include all the others, and by which all law may be understood. Is it loving, therefore, to sit in judgment of your neighbor? Is it loving to puff yourself up and feel better than they are because of their failings?

From the Apocrypha, the book of Ben Sira says: [7:6] *"Do not seek to become a judge, or you may be unable to root out injustice; you may be partial to the powerful, and so mar your integrity."* Being a judge of others is very risky business. It requires an almost superhuman quality and character, which no one is capable of maintaining. We may see this in our own judicial system where money and power absolutely play a role. If you can afford a good attorney, you can buy your fair share of justice. Because of this, justice is not often blind as it is supposed to be, (remember the famous sculpture?) and injustice is sometimes perpetuated, despite the best of intentions.

Those who live by the sword will die by the sword, that is, of course, the sword of judgment. What goes around, comes around back to you. Sit in judgment of others, and it will eventually come back around to you: you will become the object of ridicule, judgment and scorn.

Note how Jesus deals with it in the Gospel this morning. He welcomes the woman who humbles herself to minister to Him. She anoints his feet with her tears, tears of joy that she is forgiven

and tears of sadness for her sins. The judgmental host of the feast, the Pharisee, (which seems to become a synonym for hypocrite in the New Testament), says: *"Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw it, he said to himself, 'If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what kind of woman this is who is touching him—that she is a sinner.'"* He does not even speak the words out loud, but God knows the secrets of our hearts and the pride and hypocrisy of this man. Then Jesus says to the man: *"Then turning toward the woman, he said to Simon, [the Pharisee] 'Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has bathed my feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. Therefore, I tell you, her sins, which were many, have been forgiven; hence she has shown great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little.'"*

Notice how Jesus, the Great Judge connects the measure of love with his judgment. Notice that he does not condemn but forgives. Notice how this scene becomes a teaching moment not only for Simon the Pharisee, but also for us. Beware the sharp sword of judgment when you wield it, for it is not ours to judge, but to be judged by God in heaven. AMEN