

## SENDING JUDGMENT ON VACATION

9/13/20 ~ St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, Encinitas, CA (*Livestreamed*)

Proper 19 (A): Exodus 14:19-31; Psalm 114; Romans 14:1-12; Matthew 18:21-35

Who here is judgmental? Come on...you can admit it. I am. I seldom act on my judgmental thoughts, and I don't think I typically voice the judgements, but I'm often conducting my own private judge-a-thon: "Who told him to wear that? Where did she come up with that hairstyle?" And of course, more recently: "What kind of idiot doesn't wear a mask!?"

The Apostle Paul is addressing this very problem in our reading from Romans—people looking at someone else's life, and not understanding all the circumstances, but still judging. I try to turn the judgey voice off, but it seems to be human nature to judge our own choices against those of others. Psychologically, we try to confirm we've made good choices by assessing how a different choice works for others—or how it looks to us their choice is working or not.

The Letter to the Romans calls people on the carpet for this kind of overt behavior. Paul reminds church members that we can't expand the Body of Christ by insisting there's a "right way" to do things. He says there are reasons, for example, that people eat certain foods.

In his context, what was consumed, or abstained from, had to do with purity laws. Apparently some people in the early church wanted to use this as a measuring stick of whether or not others should become part of their community. The question, which is frequently still asked today, is: "Do they do things, or will they do things, the way we do them? If so, they can be a part of us; if not, we'll exclude them with our judgment."

There's another version of this idea in our Gospel reading. Jesus tells a parable about forgiveness, using the example of someone who begs to have his debt forgiven. The person he owes agrees, and then that same man, who has just had his debt forgiven, demands that someone who owes him money pay up in full!

A few weeks ago, I was in a small group at an online clergy conference, in which we were asked to reimagine this parable in a modern context. My group changed the circumstances to a landlord forgiving rent debt during a pandemic. And then the renter not forgiving the money owed by a neighbor for a shared babysitter.

But as I studied these readings this week, I wondered why we chose a context outside of our daily lives—none of us were experiencing the circumstances we dreamed up. My suspicion is it's because we don't want to think about ourselves as the one who is judgmental and unforgiving. We'd rather sit in judgment about the one who won't forgive.

So, what might that parable look like in our own lives? Maybe you're a parent helping negotiate a reconciliation between your kids after one of them broke the other's favorite toy. We as the parent might say, "Forgive your sister. It was an accident." But then when your spouse comes home, you continue to give them the silent treatment, because they forgot your anniversary the day before. How far does forgiveness go?

In this morning's passages it seems forgiveness has to do with not only not standing in judgement of someone, but of trying to understand their circumstances. I had a friend share with me, recently, that because she's Jewish, and she grew up hearing stories of people who

survived the holocaust, she's having a hard time watch her neighbors wear face coverings on the quiet sidewalks surrounding their homes.

She explained it all feels too reminiscent of people being forced to wear armbands, marking them as "other", and non-Jewish neighbors just looking away as if the armbands weren't strange. She has to consciously decide to re-frame this in her mind, but until she shared her perspective, I might've just thought she was ignorant when she asked me not to wear a mask in her presence.

Paul's point in Romans is that, as followers of Christ, we must rise above the judgements and see each other as God's beloved. Paul asks: "Why do you pass judgment on your brother or sister?", adding that we ought to leave the judgement to God. Freeing ourselves up from judging—sending our judgement on vacation, so to speak—leaves us more energy to revel in the beauty and diversity of God's creation.

So, Paul proclaims: "We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves... whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's", meaning we are ALL God's beloved. Our job is not to judge our fellow humans, rather it is to love them as God loves us.

Years ago, when I was trying to forgive someone myself, a counselor reminded me that just because you love someone, doesn't mean you have to live with them. And what I've come to realize is loving others doesn't mean you have to be friends with them, either, or even have a personal relationship with them. We can love from afar.

Forgiving—not judging—loving even our enemies is hard work, but today's message is that in the grand scheme of things, the hard work is trumped by God's grace. Whether we live or whether we die, we all belong to God. If we believe it, we believe it for everyone and send our judgment on vacation.

-AMEN

### **Collect of the Day**

O God, because without you we are not able to please you, mercifully grant that your Holy Spirit may in all things direct and rule our hearts; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

### **Exodus 14:19-31**

The angel of God who was going before the Israelite army moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud moved from in front of them and took its place behind them. It came between the army of Egypt and the army of Israel. And so the cloud was there with the darkness, and it lit up the night; one did not come near the other all night.

Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea. The LORD drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night, and turned the sea into dry land; and the waters were divided. The Israelites went into the sea on dry ground, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left. The Egyptians pursued, and went into the

sea after them, all of Pharaoh's horses, chariots, and chariot drivers. At the morning watch the LORD in the pillar of fire and cloud looked down upon the Egyptian army, and threw the Egyptian army into panic. He clogged their chariot wheels so that they turned with difficulty. The Egyptians said, "Let us flee from the Israelites, for the LORD is fighting for them against Egypt."

Then the LORD said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand over the sea, so that the water may come back upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots and chariot drivers." So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and at dawn the sea returned to its normal depth. As the Egyptians fled before it, the LORD tossed the Egyptians into the sea. The waters returned and covered the chariots and the chariot drivers, the entire army of Pharaoh that had followed them into the sea; not one of them remained. But the Israelites walked on dry ground through the sea, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left.

Thus the LORD saved Israel that day from the Egyptians; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. Israel saw the great work that the LORD did against the Egyptians. So the people feared the LORD and believed in the LORD and in his servant Moses.

### **Psalm 114**

1 Hallelujah!

When Israel came out of Egypt, \*  
the house of Jacob from a people of strange speech,

2 Judah became God's sanctuary \*  
and Israel his dominion.

3 The sea beheld it and fled; \*  
Jordan turned and went back.

4 The mountains skipped like rams, \*  
and the little hills like young sheep.

5 What ailed you, O sea, that you fled? \*  
O Jordan, that you turned back?

6 You mountains, that you skipped like rams? \*  
you little hills like young sheep?

7 Tremble, O earth, at the presence of the Lord, \*  
at the presence of the God of Jacob,

8 Who turned the hard rock into a pool of water \*  
and flint-stone into a flowing spring.

### **Romans 14:1-12**

Welcome those who are weak in faith, but not for the purpose of quarreling over opinions. Some believe in eating anything, while the weak eat only vegetables. Those who eat must not despise those who abstain, and those who abstain must not

pass judgment on those who eat; for God has welcomed them. Who are you to pass judgment on servants of another? It is before their own lord that they stand or fall. And they will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make them stand.

Some judge one day to be better than another, while others judge all days to be alike. Let all be fully convinced in their own minds. Those who observe the day, observe it in honor of the Lord. Also those who eat, eat in honor of the Lord, since they give thanks to God; while those who abstain, abstain in honor of the Lord and give thanks to God.

We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves. If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ died and lived again, so that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living.

Why do you pass judgment on your brother or sister? Or you, why do you despise your brother or sister? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. For it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall give praise to God." So then, each of us will be accountable to God.

### **Matthew 18:21-35**

Peter came and said to Jesus, "Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?" Jesus said to him, "Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times.

"For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him; and, as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, and payment to be made. So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt. But that same slave, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat, he said, 'Pay what you owe.' Then his fellow slave fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he would pay the debt. When his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. Then his lord summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you?' And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he would pay his entire debt. So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart."