# Congregational-Presbyterian Church

 **“Seeing Ourselves Clearly”**

**Matthew 7:1-5**

 **April 30, 2023**

Jesus is spending time with his disciples on a Galilean hillside where he is teaching them about the kind of life that God the Father desires they live as his children, a teaching that we know as the Sermon on the Mount. Perhaps Jesus is thinking about the judgmentalism he has observed in their lives when he tells them not to judge others. I invite you to turn with me to Matthew 7:1-5

“Do not judge others, and you will not be judged. For you will be treated as you treat others. The standard you use in judging is the standard by which you will be judged. And why worry about a speck in your friend’s eye when you have a log in your own? How can you think of saying to your friend, ‘Let me help you get rid of that speck in your eye,’ when you can’t see past the log in your own eye? Hypocrite! First get rid of the log in your own eye; then you will see well enough to deal with the speck in your friend’s eye.”

Many of the religious leaders of Jesus’ day had made judging those who didn’t live up to their standards a part of their religious practice, and many throughout society were following their lead. In their self-righteousness, they were labeling particular kinds of people as “sinners.” These so-called “sinners” included people whose behavior was unlawful, such as prostitutes; those who collaborated with the Roman government, such as tax-collectors; and people who were suffering from a serious illness or handicap, like lepers or the blind, for surely, they must have offended God in some way. Additionally, all non-Jews were included in their “sinner” category. What was implied in this judging of others as being “sinners” was their conviction that they themselves were not sinners. Jesus rightly calls them hypocrites.

This religious situation was the backdrop for Jesus’ story of a Pharisee and a tax-collector praying in the temple. The Pharisee prayed loudly and proudly, “I thank God that I am not a sinner like that tax-collector,” while the tax-collector prayed quietly and humbly, “Have mercy on me, O Lord, for I am a sinner.” Jesus said the tax-collector, but not the Pharisee, were right before God. What Jesus is saying in our passage this morning is that we are not to judge others for their sin, for we cannot claim to be without sin ourselves.

But, some will object, isn’t it important to point out sin? Isn’t it our responsibility not only to live according to God’s law, but also to teach that law to others? Yes, it is. Jesus told his disciples at the end of Matthew to “Go into all the world, making disciples and teaching them to obey all that I have commanded.” What Jesus is saying in the verses from chapter seven is that we are to point out sin without judging the sinner. Take stealing, for example. Stealing is against God’s law and we should never hesitate to say so. But, to say to the person who steals that we may judge them for their stealing, that because they are a “sinner” we no longer need to treat them with love but we will scorn them and behave condescendingly toward them, is to become an even greater sinner ourselves. They may have a speck in their eye but we are creating a big ol’ log in our own.

Before deciding what to do about sin in someone else’s life, we need to see ourselves clearly. Instead of becoming speck inspectors, we need to be self inspectors. “First,” Jesus says, “Get rid of the log in your own eye.” If we would just practice this little word “first” it would end most judgmental behavior. If we would just stop to consider the state of our own sinfulness before God, confessing it and turning to him for forgiveness, the self-awareness of seeing the reality of our sin will humble us and prepare us to gently, lovingly and graciously offer to help a friend deal with the speck in their eye.

When a group of religious leaders brought a woman who had been caught in the act of adultery to Jesus, telling him that they wanted to stone her for her behavior, Jesus said to them, “Let the one who has never sinned throw the first stone.” When the accusers heard this, they slipped away one by one, until only Jesus was left with the woman. Then Jesus said to the woman, “Where are your accusers? Didn’t even one of them condemn you?” “No, Lord,” she said. And Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you. Go and sin no more.” For God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him.