

1

Recently I began refinishing an antique tea cart that someone had painted over many years ago. As I began to strip off the grey layer of paint, I discovered a second layer of yellow paint underneath the first grey layer. Had I known I had to strip off two layers of paint, I sometimes wonder if I would have even started the project.

Have you ever started something and you're not sure how it will turn out? You begin in one place and discover the project shifting in another direction. That's a bit how I've felt this week as I read the scripture again, so I'm not sure how this sermon will turn out.

Weeks ago, I read the scripture and images came to mind of specks, logs, and sandcastles, but as I've explored this text this week, I felt like I was stripping many layers of paint off an antique piece of furniture. I don't recall exploring this text in a sermon before, and when I referred to an online sermon aid I sometimes use, I discovered it did not address this particular text as well.

And then I began to wonder, *Why haven't I explored this text before? Why have others avoided*

*Specks, Logs, & Sandcastles*  
February 10, 2019

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*this text as well? Maybe I should ignore this scripture and find something else to talk about. Maybe it will snow or get really cold, and we will cancel church, and I can avoid this passage altogether.*

Well...here we are. The text hasn't gone away. And now it's time to strip away the layers of these words that the Gospel writer Matthew has handed us from Jesus.

"Don't judge, so that you won't be judged.  
<sup>2</sup>You'll receive the same judgment you give. Whatever you deal out will be dealt out to you."<sup>1</sup>  
Oops, I think we've found the problem—the reason so many avoid this text. It hits a little close to home, doesn't it? I mean, how many times have we been judgmental against someone? It might make us squirm to know that someone could use the same judgmental standards that we use against them against us.

Or as *The Message Bible* translates the passage: "Don't pick on people, jump on their failures, criticize their faults—unless, of course, you want

*Matthew 7:1-6, 24-29*

2

the same treatment. That critical spirit has a way of boomeranging.”

Ever been critical of someone? Oops. Ever picked on someone? Oh dear. Ever spoken harsh words about someone who can't match up to your standards? Ouch.

I've known people who speak critically against others in order to inflate their own egos, puffing themselves up at the expense of those they tear down. Jesus warns us against using such harsh words while avoiding our own shortcomings. He compares it to looking at a speck in another person's eye while ignoring the log within one's own eye. How many times do we see the splinter in another while ignoring the giant log in ourselves? Jesus' words might make us squirm, but that may have been his goal: to strip away our outside layers and look deep within.

We've uncovered one layer of paint in these words of Jesus, words that we might prefer to avoid since they strike so close to home, but if we look a bit deeper, we may uncover even more. Should we? Or have we heard enough?

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Let's continue. In addition to translating the Greek word κρίνω (*krino*) as “to judge,” one could also translate it as “condemn,” as in the eternal sense of condemning someone to hell, suffering for what they've done. I've known people in the church who emphasize a lot of attention on this idea, focusing their energy on God's judgment for certain people they believe don't live the proper life. They take great pride in pointing out the specks in other people's lives while ignoring the logs growing in their own.

Disciples preacher Fred Craddock told about a time a woman spoke with him while he was visiting her church. Since he was a visiting professor preaching at their church, she asked:

“While you're here, are you going to preach on heaven and hell and judgment and stuff?” [Fred replied,] “Well, I hadn't planned on it. Is that important?” She said, “It is to me and my family.” I said, “Well, I hadn't planned to do that.” And she said, “Well, I just was hoping that you would.”

*Matthew 7:1-6, 24-29*

[Fred later reflected] I didn't pay any more attention to it until later that week when she and, I guess, her husband and several children were leaving the church. A daughter stayed behind. I guess she was maybe fifteen or sixteen, a real pretty girl. I could tell she wanted to ask me something. It's kind of the way it is when a professor preaches—people think they know things the pastor doesn't know...even though I know it's a fiction.... So, everybody was gone, her family was out on the parking lot, and here she stayed, nervous, shifting from one foot to another...

"May I ask you a question?" I said, "Yes." Her question was this: "Will I go to hell for not wanting to go to heaven?"

Well, a pretty sixteen-year-old girl asking these ultimate questions kind of blew me away for a moment. In fact, I hadn't thought much about things like that—I should, I suppose. In the rearing of our kids, I didn't use heaven and hell talk for any leverage... I said, "Why in the world are you asking that?"

She said, "Well, my mother's real suspicious. Every time I come in, she grills me: Where you been? Who was with you? What'd you do? Every time I leave the house: Where you going? Who you going with? What are you going to do? When are you going to be home? All the time, very suspicious. The way she gets at me is: If you do this, you won't go to heaven! If you don't do that, you won't go to heaven! All the time: You won't go to heaven! You won't go to heaven!"

[The girl concluded] "What my mother doesn't understand is that I'm not interested in going to heaven."<sup>2</sup>

As I read Fred's description of this conversation with this teenager girl, I began to discern why she might not have been interested in heaven, for what the girl had observed about her mother's judgmental attitude pushed her away from wanting anything to do with church or heaven.

If we dig a little deeper into Jesus' conversation with his disciples, we find a layer where he encouraged them to think of how they themselves like to be treated. We often call these words *The*

④

*Golden Rule:* “you should treat people in the same way that you want people to treat you,”<sup>3</sup> or as the Gospel writer Luke stated it, “Do to others as you would have them do to you.”<sup>4</sup>

Interestingly, we find similar words in most major world religions,<sup>5</sup> such as

Islam: “Not one of you truly believes until you wish for others what you wish for yourself.”

Buddhism: Treat not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful.”

Hinduism: “This is the sum of duty: do not do to others what would cause pain if done to you.”

We have one more layer to uncover as Jesus told a story about a wise person who built a house on rock and the foolish one who built on sand. When

the wind and waves came, which house remained? The one built on rock. The sandcastle was washed away. Jesus said, “Listening to my words will build you a solid foundation but ignoring them will get your sandcastle washed away.”

What we use as our foundation can influence our faith and those around it. Do we build on God’s loving embrace and forgiveness for our foundation, or do you build on judgment and condemnation? Which house offers a welcoming place for faith to grow? Which house inspires others to follow?

When Jesus concluded teaching the crowd, they broke out in applause, for they got it. They understood the specks, logs, and sandcastles. Do you?

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 7:1-2, *Common English Bible*

<sup>2</sup> Fred B. Craddock; Mike Graves; Richard F. Ward. *Craddock Stories* (Kindle Locations 1063-1079). Kindle Edition.

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 7:12, CEB.

<sup>4</sup> Luke 6:31, NRSV.

<sup>5</sup> [https://scarboromissions.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/item\\_34\\_lg.jpg](https://scarboromissions.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/item_34_lg.jpg)