

SERMON FOR EVENING PRAYERⁱ
The Fourth Sunday after Trinityⁱⁱ

Lessons:ⁱⁱⁱ

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the twenty-seventh Chapter of the Proverbs.^{iv}

“Boast not thyself of to morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth. Let another man praise thee, and not thine own mouth; a stranger, and not thine own lips. A stone is heavy, and the sand weighty; but a fool’s wrath is heavier than them both. Wrath is cruel, and anger is outrageous; but who is able to stand before envy? Open rebuke is better than secret love. Faithful are the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful. ... Thine own friend, and thy father’s friend, forsake not; neither go into thy brother’s house in the day of thy calamity: for better is a neighbour that is near than a brother far off. My son, be wise, and make my heart glad, that I may answer him that reproacheth me. A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself; but the simple pass on, and are punished.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the thirty-sixth Verse of the sixth Chapter of the Gospel according to St. Luke.^v

“... Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful. Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven: give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again. And he spake a parable unto them, Can the blind lead the blind? shall they not both fall into the ditch? The disciple is not above his master: but every one that is perfect shall be as his master. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother’s eye, but perceivest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Either how canst thou say to thy brother, Brother, let me pull out the mote that is in thine eye, when thou thyself beholdest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, cast out first the beam

out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to pull out the mote that is in thy brother's eye.”

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: “Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned....”^{vi} In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Introduction:

Today's Second Lesson is taken from the second part of St. Luke's account of one of Our Lord's addresses, the one that is sometimes called “The Sermon on the Plain”^{vii} to distinguish it from the better-remembered, and much longer, “Sermon on the Mount”^{viii} which St. Matthew records.

In the first part of this Sermon on the Plain, Jesus instructs His disciples on their duties toward God and, especially on how the privileges of discipleship, with its rewards in the coming Kingdom of God, are accompanied by the burdens of opposition to the kingdom of this world, with its disadvantages, hates, and deprivations here and now.

In the second part of this Sermon on the Plain, that is, from the part in which today's lesson occurs, Jesus instructs His disciples on their relationship to other men and women, with this instruction built around the general theme of love for one's enemies,^{ix,x} that is, for those who persecute Christians.^{xi}

Theme:

The words I selected for my text today are among the most familiar in all of Scripture: “Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned....” Usually, Christians hear these thrown back at us just as soon as we take some unpopular moral

position, such as our opposition to abortion or to disorderly sexual indulgences.

Development:

The implication, of course, is that those who oppose our Biblical morality consider *any* form of prudential assessment, any precaution or self-defense with which others disagree, any use of the Biblical command to exercise wise stewardship over ourselves and our environment^{xii} that does not chime in with the current politically-correct position on whatever subject is under discussion, is necessarily a “judgment” and, as such, is forbidden by our own foundational Revelation.

Thus these opponents seek to make us out to be hypocrites whenever we try to exercise moral discrimination. They try to thrust us onto the horns of a dilemma: to force us either to be what they see as “judgmental”, and thus in violation of our own norms, or to abandon those norms and principles that make us distinctively Christian, and thus be unfaithful to our commitments. Whichever horn we may choose, in either case the inescapable implication is that we are “hypocritical”.

However, as is true of so many arguments that are constructed to persuade rather than to educate, this apparent contradiction is, in reality, a false dichotomy. For if Christ had meant by “judge not” what our critics mean by “judge not”, then He could never have told us that He came not to abolish the Divine Law but to fulfill it.^{xiii} Nor would He have commended to us what we call The Summary of the Law, as being the hook from which hang “all the law and the prophets”.^{xiv} Nor would He have warned us to beware of false prophets,^{xv} for we cannot possibly identify such false prophets without exercising our powers of discrimination, that is without judging, the messages they urge us to adopt.

As is true of much specious reasoning, if not of all such, this argument turns on a misconstruction of what it means to “judge”. The word used here is the Greek *krinō*, “to judge”, which appears eighty-one times in the New Testament. Two derivatives^{xvi} of *krinō* appear a total of eight more times. So, obviously, “judging” was not a rare thing

among, or something difficult of understanding by, the people whom Our Lord addressed.

Yet of these eighty-nine uses of those related words, almost all simply refer to “judging” as an ordinary, every-day activity. Only two of them imply that there can sometimes be something dangerous or questionable about “judging” and those two are today’s passage and the almost identical passage from St. Matthew.^{xvii} So, since these two apparent uses are, in reality, just one statement by Our Lord, there are perhaps eighty-eight truly separate uses of the *krinō* family, of which eighty-seven suggest that “judging” is a normal part of life and only one urges us to caution when we undertake to perform that function.

This, then, is clearly one of those occasions when, in order to get the full meaning of Our Lord’s message, we must look at the context in which it was delivered. And to understand this context, there are two separate things we need to examine.

First, we should look at the very similar statement in St. Matthew,^{xviii} and then at the full statement in St. Luke, for when two or more of the Gospels tell almost precisely the same story about something, it is clear that for their raw materials they are each drawing on the same original source, or at least from very similar sources that trace back to the same original source. Aside from the personal memories of the Evangelists and of those they knew, these sources were primarily collections of Our Lord’s sayings that His followers noted down and circulated, probably beginning shortly after His death.

There are only three differences between St. Matthew’s account of this saying and St. Luke’s. The first is the immaterial point that St. Matthew attributes it to Our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount where St. Luke situates it in The Sermon on the Plain. The second is that St. Matthew appends to it a phrase which broadens our understanding of it. This is what St. Matthew tells us: “Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get.”^{xix}

In other words, in St. Matthew’s slightly fuller version, we see that we are not being *forbidden* to judge so much as we are being *cautioned*

that when we *do* judge, the very standards by which we judge others are the same standards that will be applied to us when we ourselves come to be judged by others.

To put this another way, if we undertake to judge, we must do so carefully, for we will be answerable for our actions. That is a very different thing than it would be to say we must never judge.

When I first began practicing law in New Orleans, just a few miles to the east, over on the Mississippi Gulf Coast, the bench of the United States District Court for the Southern District of Mississippi was occupied by a man^{xx} who was famously, or infamously, difficult, demanding, unreasonable, and arbitrary. I know of one case which he decided according to what he claimed was a rule of Mississippi law but which was in fact an unsuccessful argument he himself had made, many years before, to the Mississippi Supreme Court. That Court had told him emphatically that his suggested proposition was *not* the law of Mississippi, so apparently he was distorting history in order to create for himself some sort of retroactive vindication.

Needless to say, lawyers left no stone unturned in their efforts to avoid trying any case before this man. As Lord Acton observed, power tends to corrupt, and this man's power as a Federal judge foolishly convinced him that no rules or laws applied to him, including, in one well-publicized incident, laws about when it is permissible to hunt ducks. So, inevitably, he came a cropper^{xxi} and ended up being judged by another Federal judge and also by the United States Senate according to the same rules and principles that he had sworn to apply in his own court. And so he ended his career, impeached and removed from office, disbarred, and in Federal prison for perjury.

When I returned from Ohio to Louisiana in late 2008, there was unfolding in a neighboring Parish (civil Parish that is, what other states would call a "county") a long-running public corruption scandal. As a result of Federal investigations of local misconduct, a number of judges in this particular Parish had been sacked from the bench and disbarred and several of them, as well as other Parish officials, had gone to jail. The principal remaining case was that of a judge^{xxii} who had managed to get elevated to the Federal bench in New Orleans after taking payoffs in cases before him in the state court but prior to the courthouse scandal's

becoming public knowledge. Last year, he was finally disbarred as a Louisiana lawyer and two years ago the U.S. Senate convicted him of “high crimes and misdemeanors”—again, principally perjury—and removed him from office, just prior to the time when he could have retired and so vested a lifetime pension at full salary.

Unfortunately, this particular man was actually fair and gracious to all who appeared in his courtroom, except those who were entangled in cases in which his illicit paymasters had financial interests. Then he remained gracious but was, of course, far from fair.^{xxiii} Nevertheless, he, like the prior one of whom I told you, discovered what it means to be judged according to the law by which he himself had judged.

Now the point of these sad stories is not that we should not have judges; society could not operate without them. The point is that those who undertake the function of judging must do so in an honest, dispassionate, and impartial fashion, not letting their august office turn their heads and always remaining aware that they, too, may be called to account for their actions.

This brings us to the third slight difference between St. Matthew’s and St. Luke’s accounts of the basic saying about being careful when judging. Where St. Matthew added a phrase that St. Luke did not report, St. Luke adds a different phrase that St. Matthew does not report: “Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned....”

The phrase missing from St. Matthew is that “condemn not, and you will not be condemned”. As it is part of the same sentence as is the one with which we are concerned, clearly in St. Luke’s mind the two ideas are intimately connected. But what is that connection?

In several places in the New Testament, where our English versions give the word “condemn”, the Greek original is our old friend, *krinō*, that is, is the same as the word that here is used for “judge” in the earlier part of the same sentence. Here, however, a different word is used for “condemn”, one that appears only seventeen times in the whole New Testament. This word is *katadikā*, “to pronounce judgment against one”.

Therefore, the logical construction of St. Luke’s entire clause is most certainly *not*, as our critics wish it were, “Refrain from exercising your faculties of discrimination for fear that someone else may be equally discriminating in assessing your conduct of you”. Nor, most certainly, is it, as we are too often told, “Refrain from taking sensible precautions to protect yourself and others, because taking those precautions is not affirming toward the predatory lifestyle”.

Rather, in the elliptical, hyperbolic style of so many of Our Lord’s sayings, what He is warning here is probably better rendered as “If you take upon yourself the task of judging (*krinō*), and especially if you carry that task through to its logical completion by rendering judgment on another (*katadikā*), do so with the understanding that you yourself will be held to the same standards you apply to others.”

Conclusion:

Today’s text, then, is far from being an injunction that tries to tell us that all moral or rational bets are off. Instead, it is another statement of the implications of something Our Lord said in the early part of His Sermon on the Mount in St. Matthew’s Gospel, and note here, as in St. Luke, the connection between “enemies” and “those who persecute you”. That statement is: “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for he makes his sun—[that is S-U-N]—rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.”^{xxiv}

In the end, then, Our Lord’s warning that is today’s text is simply one more example of the fundamental principle that we have come to call “The Golden Rule”—and which, not surprisingly, is found in St. Luke only six verses before today’s Second Lesson begins: “[A]s you wish that men would do to you, do so to them.”^{xxv}

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The Revd Canon John A. Hollister JD^{xxvi}

July 1, 2012

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- ⁱ “Any set of Psalms and Lessons appointed for the evening of any day may be read at the morning service, and any set of morning Psalms and Lessons may be read in the evening.” Concerning the Service of the Church, *THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER* viii (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).
- ⁱⁱ This sermon was originally written on the Gospel at Mass on the Fourth Sunday after Trinity, 2012.
- ⁱⁱⁱ *Psalms and Lessons for the Christian Year (1943)*, *THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER* xxix (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).
- ^{iv} Proverbs 27:1-6, 10-12 (KJV).
- ^v St. Luke 6:36-42 (KJV).
- ^{vi} St. Luke 6:37a (RSV).
- ^{vii} St. Luke 6:17-49.
- ^{viii} St. Matthew 5:1-7:29.
- ^{ix} St. Luke 6:27 ff.
- ^x I. H. Marshall, *Luke*, in D. GUTHRIE AND J. A. MOTYER, EDs., *THE NEW BIBLE COMMENTARY REVISED* (3rd ed.) 899 (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1970).
- ^{xi} Marshall, *op. cit.*
- ^{xii} Genesis 1:27-31 & 2:19-20; cf. Psalm 8:6-8.
- ^{xiii} St. Matthew 5:17-18.
- ^{xiv} St. Matthew 22:40.
- ^{xv} St. Matthew 7:15.
- ^{xvi} *Anakrinō*, “to judge afresh”, and *diakrinō*, “to judge thoroughly”.
- ^{xvii} St. Matthew 7:1.
- ^{xviii} St. Matthew 7:1.
- ^{xix} St. Matthew 7:1-2 (RSV).
- ^{xx} Walter Louis Nixon, Jr. *Nixon’s impeachment proceedings for perjury were cited as a precedent in the charges later brought against President William Jefferson Clinton.*
- ^{xxi} His downfall occurred when he used his “clout” to interfere in a state criminal prosecution, persuading the local prosecutor to drop charges against a friend of his. Then, when the circumstances of that dismissal were investigated, Judge Nixon lied about them to conceal his abuse of his influence.
- ^{xxii} G. Thomas Porteous, Jr.
- ^{xxiii} The actual charges arose out of cases in which Judge Porteous was paid off by bail bondsmen to require cash bonds, from which those bondsmen profited, in lieu of the releases on their own recognizance to which the defendants would normally have been entitled.
- ^{xxiv} St. Matthew 5:44-45.
- ^{xxv} St. Luke 6:31 (RSV).
- ^{xxvi} Priest-in-Charge, Holy Angels Anglican Catholic Mission, Picayune MS; Honorary Canon, The Diocese of the Resurrection, and Honorary Canon and

Canon to the Ordinary, The Diocese of New Orleans, The Anglican Catholic Church.