

Sermon Title: *Judgement and Comparison*

Introduction to Prophets:

- Biblical prophets like Elijah, Ezekiel, and Jeremiah were messengers of God, calling people to repentance.
- Prophets often faced rejection and hostility, as Jeremiah did when his own people plotted to kill him.
- Discussion of modern-day "prophets" such as environmental activists, social justice leaders, and Christian voices, noting that they too often face difficulties.

Jeremiah's Struggle:

- Jeremiah, known as the "Weeping Prophet," faced personal anguish and threats for delivering God's message.
- Prophets challenge people to change their ways, which is often met with resistance.

Jesus Prepares His Disciples:

- In Mark 9, Jesus predicts his own suffering and rejection, but the disciples struggle to understand.
- Jesus chose ordinary, imperfect people to be his disciples, many of whom were flawed and had been rejected by others.
- Despite their closeness to Jesus, the disciples failed to grasp the gravity of what Jesus was telling them.

The Disciples' Argument:

- Instead of focusing on Jesus' warning, the disciples argued about who among them was the greatest.
- Jesus corrected their mindset by teaching them that true greatness comes through humility and service.

The Danger of Comparison:

- The sermon references the phrase "Comparison is the thief of joy," emphasizing that comparing ourselves to others leads to envy and discontent.
- Society often encourages comparison, from childhood education to social media, making it difficult to live with gratitude for our own unique gifts.

Jesus' Lesson on Leadership:

- Jesus uses a child, a symbol of vulnerability and low status in ancient times, to illustrate that greatness in God's Kingdom comes from welcoming and serving those who are least valued.
- True leadership, as Jesus teaches, is about being the servant of all, particularly those who are marginalised.

Reflection on Servant Leadership:

- The church and individuals are called to embrace servant leadership by welcoming and valuing those whom society overlooks.
- Welcoming is more than being polite; it's about offering respect, dignity, and hospitality to all, especially the marginalised.

Personal Application:

- We are all leaders in some way—in our families, communities, and churches.
- We should reflect on how we compare ourselves to others, and how Jesus calls us to accept who we are, using our gifts to serve rather than compete.
- The message concludes with an invitation to respond by accepting ourselves as loved and valued by God, and by embracing the call to servant leadership in our remaining time on Earth.

Questions:

1. **Jeremiah 11:18-20:** Jeremiah was known as the "Weeping Prophet" because of the rejection and threats he faced. How do we deal with rejection or hostility when standing up for our beliefs today? How can Jeremiah's perseverance encourage us?
2. **Mark 9:30-37:** In the passage, the disciples were afraid to ask Jesus questions about his predictions. What holds us back from asking God or others difficult questions about faith, suffering, or our struggles? How can we cultivate a space of openness in our faith communities?
3. **Prophets and Modern-day Voices:** Who are the "prophets" in our world today? How do they challenge societal norms, and how might we discern whether they are speaking truth or leading us astray?
4. **Comparison and Joy:** Reflecting on the phrase "Comparison is the thief of joy," how does comparing ourselves to others steal our contentment and gratitude? How can we focus on the gifts God has given us instead?
5. **Servant Leadership:** Jesus teaches that the greatest must be the servant of all. What does this look like in practice in our church and community? How do we welcome and serve those whom society deems insignificant or unworthy?
6. **Welcoming Children:** Jesus elevates the status of children, who had little value in his time. What can we learn from his teaching about valuing the marginalised? How do we, as a church, welcome children and others who might disrupt our routines?