

Minster 8.00am, BCP HC, Sun July 17<sup>th</sup> 2011

Readings: Rom 8: 18-23 Luke 6: 36-42

Theme: Judging others

Aims: To consider why we judge others and how to follow Jesus' command not to! (and why)

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Being judgemental  
has become something of a characteristic  
of our modern culture.

TV shows which are based on people being judged by others are multiplying at an extraordinary rate. I think one of the first of this genre was The Weakest Link; and now, we have the X Factor, Britain's Got Talent, Strictly Come Dancing and, one that was finishing just last week, Popstar to Opera Star.

The last two of these are for celebrities – people who are already in the public domain – but the first two feature ordinary Joe Public; granted, those who come forward and volunteer to make a fool of themselves on TV!

Why does judging others come so naturally to us? Perhaps it's part of our basic survival kit – if we can quickly sum up other

people, we know how to behave towards them. It might give us an advantage if we judge them to be inferior to ourselves in some way. It might give us that split second to assemble our response or our defence. Or if we judge others to be more well equipped (more well educated, wealthy, or with social advantage) than us, it might tell us to keep away!

We are all encouraged to judge others. We do it naturally; it seems to come to us very easily.

Which is why, perhaps, following Jesus' command not to judge others is sometimes hard.

Our Gospel passage from Luke comes just after Jesus has prayed all night and then chosen his twelve disciples. He comes down from the mountain top with them and meets a great crowd, a great multitude of people on a level place, and teaches them.

First come the Beatitudes. Then a whole collection of instructions on how to live – a whole collection of Jesus' sayings:

“Love your enemies...bless those who curse you...do to others as you would have them do to you...”

And then our passage – “Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful...do not judge...”.

Jesus is teaching those who want to follow him, those who believe in him. People like us.

Jesus himself was non-judgemental.

Let’s think about the implications of that.

It means that no-one who is  
more or less wealthy,  
more or less educated,  
more or less powerful,  
or more or less intelligent,  
is judged by him *just for being these things*.

We know (from reading the Bible) that, given a choice, God sides with the poor. They inherit the earth. They are to be looked after. And that, at the end of time, God will judge the world.

Yes, God is the ultimate judge. He is the one who *is able to tell* what people are really like, what’s in their hearts – because

we certainly can’t! And that’s the point. We are not like God, we don’t know people as well as He does.

But God does not just judge people. He is also merciful.

Our reading began, “Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful”.

And later, we are urged that “The disciple is not above his master; but every one that is perfect shall be as his master”

In other words, “*Be like Jesus*” (v 40). Follow Jesus as our role model, as he showed us what being a perfect human being was all about.

He didn’t show us that we can be like God, as he himself was. He showed us how to be *ourselves*. Human.

And it means that we don’t judge anyone else, because we don’t have enough knowledge about them but also because it’s not our right to – that right is God’s alone.

So when we next get involved in watching a TV show that demands criticism of the participants; or find ourselves making unfair judgements about others, let us stop – remember Jesus’ teaching – and ask forgiveness from God.

We, who are the new community that Jesus was addressing in his Sermon on the Mount, are encouraged by Jesus to live out of God's grace.

And to be merciful, as God himself is merciful.

Amen.