

MATTHEW 15:10-28
Judging others makes us blind

Many of us will have been in airports and had flights cancelled or delayed at some time or other. We all know the frustrations, annoyance and distress when schedules are messed up. And we all know that sometimes that brings the worst out in others and sometimes in us.

I read about one passenger in just that situation whose flight had been cancelled due to bad weather. There was a solitary agent trying to rebook all the travellers. One passenger pushed his way to the front of a very long queue and slammed his ticket down on the counter.

He said, 'I have to be on this flight and it has to be first class'!
The agent politely apologised and told him that she would help him as soon as she could, but there were many people in the queue and she asked him to wait his turn.

He became indignant, 'do you have any idea who I am'.

Quite calmly the agent picked up the microphone and said to all who were present in the terminal,
'may I have your attention please'.
'we have a passenger here at the gate who does not know who he is'.
'If anyone can help him find his identity, please come to the gate'?

The man --- backed off and the crowd of people broke into spontaneous applause.

It's hard to respect anyone who judges themselves to be of greater value and importance than anyone else.

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The theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer once said,
Judging others makes us blind. In judging others we blind ourselves to our own evil and to the grace which others are just as entitled to as we are.

Jesus teaching in chapter 15 of Matthews Gospel is directed at how the Pharisees and those gathered around judged and valued others.

Teaching that is just as relevant for us today.

Val talked to us last week about Jesus wonderful miracle in feeding the five thousand and then how the disciples watched in awe and doubt as Jesus walked on water, beckoning Peter to do the same.

He sank!

But Jesus tells the disciples they must trust and have faith and Val reminded us of the importance of prayer to maintain our focus on the Lord.

As the story moves on Jesus takes his disciples to the shores of Gennesarat. Crowds gather with the sick and infirm but those approaching him this time included a delegation of Pharisees and scribes from Jerusalem. Teachers and high ranking men well versed and respected in the traditions and laws of Moses. They have come to watch and see, to ask questions.

They question the behaviour of Jesus disciples, but not of himself. Not because Jesus behaves differently but in view of his popularity they may have chosen this approach because it was safer. It was certainly not out of any respect for him.

'Why do your disciples not wash their hands before they eat?' they said.

The ritual purity traditions including hand washing is part of Mosaic law. The Pharisees believe the disciples of Jesus are not respecting the rabbinic traditions. Traditions handed down over centuries and referred to as the Halakah. To the Pharisees these traditions had as much authority as God's law itself. Hand washing was just one example.

The Pharisees now question Jesus about his disciples disrespect of the ritual tradition of hand washing.

They had questioned Jesus earlier about eating with tax collectors and sinners, And about healing on the Sabbath(ch9).

Now they confront him about his disciples transgressions about ritual washing, the purity traditions.

Jesus responded with a counterattack. He makes a basic distinction between God's commandments and the Jews traditions. The rules of ritual purity, he says, give human tradition precedence over God's Word.

He tells them it's not what goes in the mouth that defiles *but what comes out.*

'What comes out of the mouth, he says, comes from the heart'

In essence,

It is the words we speak, or don't speak, and the actions we take that defile they show the very nature of us, our inner selves.

Jesus tells the Pharisees they are blind to their own ignorance, fixated with external concerns instead of their relationship with God. They will be rooted out like the vines that bear no fruit.

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But there is a conflict.

The tension throughout so much of New Testament is between the faithfulness to scriptural and ritual traditions that go back to the Israelites in the time of Moses and the exclusion of Gentiles. Jesus now proposes a radical new perspective that decrees the ritual traditions false and judgemental. This new WAY connects Jesus teaching on what defiles to the story of the Canaanite Woman. But Jewish traditions would say that what defiles also keeps them separate from Canaanites who are considered unclean, wicked and idolatrous.

The Canaanite woman cries out to Jesus.
'Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David'.

Why?

She's a non-Israelite, a pagan, an unclean unbelieving Gentile.

Lord, the address used by believers of Jesus Christ,
Son of David, the term rooted in Jesus genealogy throughout the Old Testament
And restated in the first sentence of Matthews Gospel.
'Jesus Christ, Son of David, the Son of Abraham'.

Lord, Son of David
This term now used by a Canaanite woman?

But, Jesus ignores her.
He has come to save the lost Jewish children of Israel,
not Gentiles and certainly not Canaanites, they're enemies of old.

He is down right rude.
'Its not fair to take the Children's food and throw it to the dogs' ,
The Children are the Jewish people of Israel.
Dogs are those not versed in the Torah.

But, The Canaanite woman, does not give up.
She doesn't deny Jesus self-identification as the Messiah of Israel but pleads with him to
extend his horizon to others.

She says that Gentiles roaming the streets like dogs, ---- look for crumbs and she cries out
for just a little of left-over mercy for her child.

'even the dogs eat the crumbs from under the table', she says.

Jesus rewards her immense display of persistence and faith with the good news of God's saving grace -- by healing her daughter:

Jesus mission of salvation is not just to the Israelites but to Gentiles,
And To all.

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This story and that of the Pharisees and scribes has significance for us all.

Psalm 67 is sung as a community thanksgiving for the coming of God to his people.

It acknowledges the life-giving revelation and assurance of God's grace and loving kindness to us all.

But if we are wrapped up in ritualistic minutiae, we miss the point.

So we need to ask ourselves:

Are we like the passenger in the airport terminal whose judgement of others is blind to his own failings?

Are we Like the Pharisees and Scribes who are fixated on ritual traditions and man-made rules, not those of God?

Or are we like the Canaanite woman, persistent in our prayerful trust and faith in the Lord?

Maybe all of us, -- need to keep looking at the way we are judging, valuing and respecting others , how we show that and whether our words and actions match up to God's life-giving Word.

Amen