

August 15, 2010

Rev. Dr. Steven H. Koski

Living Streams - "Living Beyond Judgment"

2 Corinthians 5.17-20

Matthew 7.1-5

A husband makes an appointment with the family doctor out of concern, and a great deal of frustration, over his wife's apparent hearing loss.

"I think she's going deaf," he says to the doctor. "She never hears me the first time I say something to her. In fact, I have to repeat things over and over and over again before she responds.

"Well," the doctor responds, "Until she's willing to come in to see me, here's something you can do to help measure the severity of her loss of hearing. When you get home, stand about 15 feet away from her and say something. If she doesn't reply, move 5ft. closer and say it again. Keep doing this until she replies so we can get some idea of the severity of her deafness."

This seemed like a good idea to the husband, so he decided to try it. When he got home, his wife was in the kitchen chopping vegetables. Standing about 15 ft. away from her, he says to her, "Honey, what's for dinner?"

No response. So he moves a little closer and asks again, "Honey, what's for dinner?" Still no response. Moving a bit closer, he asks again. No response. Finally, he moves right next to her and asks for the last time, "Honey, what's for dinner?"

To which she replies, 'For the FOURTH time, vegetable stew!' What a human tendency it is to be judgmental and critical of others focusing on what we judge to be wrong with them and not be

willing to look at ourselves. There's a human tendency to look at others and make judgments about who they are before we even know their name or hear their story.

Stephen Covey tells of an experience he had on a New York Subway,

“People were sitting quietly – some reading newspapers, some lost in thought, some resting with their eyes closed. It was a calm, peaceful scene. Then suddenly, a man and his children entered the subway car. The children were yelling back and forth, throwing things, even grabbing people's papers. It was very disturbing. And, yet, the man sitting next to me did nothing. It was difficult not to feel irritated. I could not believe that he could be so insensitive as to let his children run wild like that and do nothing about it, taking no responsibility at all. It was easy to see that every one else on the subway felt irritated, too. So, finally, with as much restraint as I could muster, I turned to the man and said, “Sir, your children are really disturbing a lot of people. Could you possibly control them a little bit more?”

The man lifted his gaze as if to come to a consciousness of the situation for the first time and said softly, ‘Oh, you're right. I guess I should do something about it. We just came from the hospital where their mother died about an hour ago. I don't know what to think, and I guess they don't know how to handle it either.’”

Most of the time we don't know all the facts. We don't know what is really going on inside of people. We don't know the loads they are carrying. We don't know what pain and suffering they may be experiencing. But, there seems to be this human tendency to make assumptions, judge and be critical of others.

Mother Theresa said, “You can not judge and love someone at the same time.”

There may be no greater need in the world today than for Muslims and Christians to get to know one another's name and story, to learn about one another's faith, to build relationships and trust. We make so many judgments and assumptions based on headlines in the news whose very job it is to sensationalize issues to get ratings.

I know of a Presbyterian Church in New York City who just began a campaign during Ramadan, the month long season of fasting for the Islamic faith that began last week, to intentionally step out of their comfort zones and reach out and invite their Muslim neighbors for a coffee, to get to know their name, to hear their story.

I know of a Presbyterian Church in Arizona who has decided before they make judgments and assumptions and decide where they stand on the Immigration issue they started a ministry in cooperation with Border Links for each family in the church to host a dinner for a family who is in the country illegally...to get to know their names and to hear their stories.

Our Bible reading today said, 'God was in Christ reconciling the world to God's self...and we have been given this ministry of reconciliation.' Reconciliation – moving toward now way, moving with not against.

What God was up to in Jesus, how God's Spirit was moving in Jesus, was joining together that which is separate, healing and making whole that which is divided, breaking down walls and barriers between people. And we've been given that job.

Think about this for a minute...every thought you have, every behavior, every act either joins you with some one or separates you. It is the dream of God's heart for all to be joined as one.

In relationships, it is so easy to judge and be critical of the other person and point out their flaws and highlight what they are doing wrong. The tendency is to focus on what's wrong with the other person and how they need to change. We don't stop to think about the impact our judgmental and critical spirit may have.

An amazing change in energy happens when you shift your focus away from judging and being critical of others and you ask yourself, "Are my thoughts joining or separating...are the choices I am making right now moving me towards or moving me away...am I being loving?"

Again, Mother Theresa said it so simply and powerfully, "You can't love a person and judge a person at the same time."

Our summer message series is Living Streams. There is a River of Grace and Life and Love running through our lives. Spirit of Grace and forgiveness and Compassion flowing in and through our lives. We've been looking this summer at the ways we block and impede the flow of that Grace. It is clear in today's Bible reading that when you live in the flow of the Spirit you participate in reconciliation and others experience grace and love and acceptance in and through you.

What would it look like to have streams of mercy, grace, love and acceptance flowing from our hearts and doors? It would seem that one of the biggest impediments to the flow of grace is being judgmental.

Jesus said, "Do not judge, so that you may not be judged." There's a big difference between being discerning and being judgmental and the difference is a matter of the heart. We are making judgments all the time. the question is whether we bring a heart and spirit of grace and compassion to our judgments.

Jesus here is talking about being judgmental. The Greek word translated as “Do not JUDGE” is Krino which is probably best translated “to be critical” or “to condemn.”

I love how Eugene Peterson translates this verse in *The Message*, “Don’t pick on people, jump on their failures, criticize their faults – unless, of course, you want the same treatment. That critical spirit has a way of boomeranging” . . . kind of like having smelly mustard on your lip and wondering why everyone around you smells.

Jesus is saying, “Don’t be critical or condemn others.” Again, you can’t judge a person and love them at the same time.

Every thought . . . every behavior either joins you or separates. When we are in the flow of the Spirit, living life in the Spirit, we are joining, we are participating in the ministry of reconciliation. Jesus says, “For with the judgment you make you will be judged . . .” Eugene Peterson put it this way, “That critical spirit has a way of boomeranging.”

There’s actually a science called HeartMath that is able to show how your thinking affects your heart, how negative, critical judgmental thoughts create negative, stressful heart rhythms. Judgmental thoughts literally block the flow of the energy of love in our hearts.

The HeartMath scientists measured the electrical fields around people and have proven the energy in our hearts is felt by other people who are within 10 feet of us . . . negative energy can be like a virus others catch and react to.

Jesus wasn’t a doctor or scientist but he knew the impact judgmental and critical thoughts have on the heart and the flow of love’s energy. He knew how important heart rhythms are. He knew

you can't judge and love a person at the same time. he knew there is this ceaseless flow of Grace running through our lives whose current runs deep in our hearts. He knew the key was to take time each day to allow the rhythms of God's heart to change the rhythms of his own heart . . . to not impede the flow of Grace but be a channel of that Grace.

Looking at the story of Jesus, he seems to always go out of his way to encounter and get to know the names and stories of all kinds of people, accepting them at face value.

And, if we are following Jesus, chances are we will be called to go out of our way in order to encounter all kinds of people – to move towards people in the spirit of reconciliation and not away or against in a spirit of judgment, especially the people many others try to convince us we should avoid and fear.

Insulted and safe lives surrounded by those who think and look like us are not what we signed up for when we said we would follow Jesus. Jesus was never insulated from people's pain, and he sure didn't keep to safe practices.

Rather than judge and condemn, he engaged with those who were being crushed by their mistakes and bad choices. Jesus wiped away the tears of prostitutes, held the hands of the outcasts, welcomed the foreigner, and touched the wounds of the sick and the crazy.

He hung out with the not-so-perfect people and showed them what a heart of grace was all about. They felt the heart rhythms of radical love in his presence. What heart rhythm do people feel in your presence?

He was never concerned about a person's title, society's name tag, or the sign on their place of work. Porn stars or preachers, gay or straight, Republican or Democrat, Muslim or Christian, legal or illegal, it doesn't mean a rip to God. Because we are ALL God's

precious children, and we are all in need of this stunningly beautiful thing called Grace.

According to research by the Barna Group, right now 87%, nearly nine out of 10 young adults say the term judgmental most accurately describes present day Christianity. The fact of the matter is that Christians today, in general, are not known by their love but by the judgments we make on others. When did we start being more concerned with judging the state of other people's lives than seeking to become more holy ourselves?

I wonder what it would look like if we could fascinate the community we live in and even the world with Grace . . . living streams of Grace – showing people around us how different it looks when a community is welcoming all people as precious children of God, seeing the best in every one, forgiving one another, going out of our way to love one another. Offering unmerited and undeserved Grace to one another.

What would it look like to have streams of mercy, grace, love and acceptance flowing from our hearts and doors?

What would it mean for every single person who walked inside our doors – or who we come in contact with outside our doors – those who look like us and those who don't look like us, those who think like us and those who don't think like us, those who dress like us and those who don't dress like us, those who are easy to like and those who are easy to dislike – what if everyone was greet by authentic love – a love that always looks for the BEST in others.

Pretty radical idea, huh? Tony Campolo said, "If Christianity isn't radical, it isn't Christianity, at least the Christainity that reflects the heart rhythm of Jesus."

You can't love a person and judge a person at the same time. And the difference for us is our trust there are those living streams of Grace flowing in and through our lives . . . whose currents run deep in our hearts . . . we are able to have because we are loved unconditionally . . . we are encouraged each day to stop, to be still, to become aware of the rhythms of God's heart beating, to allow the rhythms of God's heart to change our heart rhythms.

PRAYER – May your Grace change our heart rhythms that the whole world might see Your heart through us! May it be so!