
The Measure You Give Will Be The Measure You Get Back; First, No Judgement

**A sermon by the Very Rev. Sam Candler
The Seventh Sunday after the Epiphany – Year C**

*“Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.
Do not judge, and you will not be judged;
do not condemn, and you will not be condemned.
Forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you.
A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you
give will be the measure you get back.”*
(Luke 6:36-38)

When I was young (yesterday!), one of the popular images of God was that of an old, fiery-eyed white-bearded white man, who scolded all the time. He was watching. He was keeping score. He kept a big judgement book; and when you died, God read from that judgement book and sentenced you according to that giant scorebook.

One of the many conversions of my life, or true realizations, was that God is not that cold-hearted judge. God is not a “heavenly scolder.”

I certainly acknowledge that God does know us, better than we know ourselves. God is an excellent judge of character. God is a judge that way: God is a kind knower of people. But that is another story. There is judgement, but it is kind. Again, that is another story, another sermon.

My point this morning is that, over the centuries, the Church adopted more and more this fiery-eyed image of God as a heavenly scolder. Once the Church believed it, we began to imitate the image. The Church preached on it and used the image to accumulate more power for itself. Thus, more and more, the Church herself took on the image of being a heavenly scolder.

I may have failed, but I have spent my entire ministry trying to un-do that image. I have spent my ministry trying to teach, and trying to model, a God who does not scold. Thus, I have been considered a liberal by the conservatives, because I was fiddling with an image of God. Yet, I have been considered a conservative by the liberals because I want people to believe in a kind and personal God!

I teach of a non-scolding God, because I have realized another conversion, a critical spiritual principle of life. It is this: Whatever we admire, we become. Whatever we worship, we become. If we believe in a scolding God, we become scolders ourselves.

Early on in this covid pandemic, this was a reason that I adopted the principle: “First, no judgement.” That principle comes from our gospel for this morning, Luke 6:37, “Judge not.” (I got the principle from scripture!)

But this image of a judging and scolding god is hard to reverse! It is hard to teach, and to model, the kindness of God instead. For some reason, we have a human predilection to quickly take negative postures, to assume threats and dangers. Maybe that tendency comes from our inherited survival skills in the wild. Maybe it is our inherited sin.

But wherever the tendency comes from, it seems that every crisis in our time provides the Church another opportunity to scold. Whether we are conservative or liberal, the more we scold, the more we are teaching the

world to scold! When people go to a church that scolds, whether conservative or liberal, they learn to scold. It doesn't matter whether our God is a white male at all. It could be black male. Or a white female. Or a black female. Conservative or liberal, the result is the same. Scolders teach people to scold.

It's hard to teach kindness. It is hard take the gentle, non-scolding, approach. It takes practice, so much practice, until, one day, it is not so hard. Practicing non-scolding is like practicing non-anxiousness. It's hard, until one day, with practice, maybe it becomes part of our nature.

That is the Church I want to be a part of, a Church that practices non-scolding. It's about becoming what we model. Judge, and we learn to judge. Judge not, and we learn to judge not.

This principle is actually illustrated throughout scripture, and throughout the lives of the saints. The way we imagine God is the way we experience God. The way we project God is the way we experience God. If we project God to be a judge, then we will experience God as judge. We will reap judgement. But if we imagine God as forgiver, then we reap forgiveness, too.

In our Genesis lesson this morning, we hear a story about Joseph, Joseph the forgiver. How in the world did Joseph learn forgiveness? I imagine that it took a lot of practice. The last thirteen chapters of Genesis, the long story of Joseph, including his brothers selling him into slavery, is a story about forgiveness.

Finally, in the last chapter, the brothers of Joseph ask for forgiveness. Joseph weeps, and his brothers weep, and Joseph says, "Do not be afraid! ...Even though you intended harm to me, God intended it for good. So have no fear; I myself will provide for you and your little ones.' In this way [the Book of Genesis says] he reassured them, speaking kindly to them." (Genesis 50:19-21).

Joseph realized that God is kind. God is kind, and so Joseph could be kind, too.

This past Wednesday, in one of his online meditations, a saint of our own time illustrated this principle in another way. Richard Rohr, the jolly Franciscan, said,

"a Christian is someone who's met one, because this whole thing is contagious! When we meet a person of a certain quality of maturity, we too can become more mature. We meet a patient person and we learn how to be patient. We meet a loving person and we learn how to be loving. That's the way human beings operate. When we meet a really grounded, happy, and free person, we become more like that because we'll be satisfied with nothing less. This whole thing, our faith, spreads through and by the quality of our relationships." (from Richard Rohr's *Daily Meditation*, February 16, 2022, Center for Action and Contemplation).

The principle is this: God is kind. If we imitate a kind God, we grow into kindness, too. If we imitate a forgiving God, we grow into forgiveness, too.

In today's gospel lesson in Luke, from his Sermon on the Plain, Jesus is talking about this very principle.

The verse here from Luke has a similar cadence: "Forgive, and it shall be forgiven you." But here is the point. There are two ways to believe this verse! The first way is the old way, the scolding way, as if God is a cold-hearted judge, commanding us to forgive if we want to be forgiven.

It is wrong. We don't get forgiven because someone is keeping score, as if it is some transaction. Again, it is not about a judge keeping score. No. We get forgiven because of an amazingly natural process, maybe even a biological, physical process, certainly a spiritual principle. We become whom we imitate. We grow into the people with whom we spend time, to whom we listen, whom we involuntarily imitate even, whom we worship. We get forgiven, naturally, as we forgive.

If we spend our time and energy listening to scolders, we will become scolders. If we spend our time with mean judgement, we become mean judges. If we spend our time with forgivers, behold, we become kind forgivers.

I thank God for the kind people among us today. And I thank God for kind churches, where the world learns gentleness and forgiveness.

Jesus sums it up by saying, "The measure you give will be the measure you get back." It is a natural, spiritual principle: We get back what we give into the world. God teaches us, through the Church, through each other, to give this world mercy and loving kindness.

AMEN.

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