

## Giving up Judging Others for Lent

3 March 2018

Sunday before Lent, St Luke's

Reading: Luke 6:37-45

I heard of a very successful executive driving down a suburban street in his brand new silver Jaguar. Suddenly a brick was thrown from the footpath thumping dangerously into the side of the car. Stopping suddenly he looked into his rear vision mirror. Standing on the footpath was a young teenage boy seeming totally blasé about the harm he had just caused. What would you do? What's your initial reaction?

I can tell you what the executive did, he spun the car around and went back to the spot from where the brick had been thrown. He jumped out, grabbed the kid who had thrown the brick and pushed him up against a parked car. "What was that all about?!" he screamed. "That's my new Jag. That brick you threw is gonna cost you a lot of money!"

"Please, Mister, please .... I'm sorry! I didn't know what else to do!" pleaded the youngster. "I threw the brick because no one else would stop!" Tears were dripping down the boy's chin as he pointed around the parked car. "It's my brother, Mister," he said. "He rolled off the footpath and fell out of his wheelchair and I can't lift him up." Sobbing, the boy asked the executive, "Would you please help me get him back into his wheelchair? He's hurt and he's too heavy for me."

Suddenly the mood was transformed as the businessmen realised what had occurred. He had been so quick to judge the boy for what he did but he would have done just the same thing in his shoes. He lifted the young man into the wheelchair and took out his handkerchief and wiped the scrapes and cuts. Then he watched as the younger brother pushed the boy down the footpath towards home.

There's an old north American Indian saying: *Never judge someone until you've walked ten miles in their moccasins.* (That way they can't catch you and you have a new pair of shoes.)

Luke our Gospel writer gives us several of Jesus' very well known sayings. I want to focus on just one. Verse 37: "Do not judge and you will not be judged. Do not condemn and you will not be condemned." He expands these commands by using an illustration. "Why do you see the speck in your neighbour's eye but not the log in your own? How can you say to your friend let me take out the speck in your eye when you do not see the log in your own?"

On Wednesday we enter the season of the church year called Lent. Lent is when we follow the example of Jesus in the desert and spend 40 days in greater dependence on God. Lent began in the early church. Easter was always the time when people were baptised and the days leading up to Easter were a time of preparation for baptism. So helpful was this time of preparation that very soon the whole church entered into it. Many centuries later Islam picked up this idea and called it Ramadan.

Traditionally Lent is a time to enter into a deeper relationship with God.

Your parish is offering three ways you can do this. First we have Lenten study groups, one after the Wednesday service, one on Tuesday night, and one at 7pm on Sunday night. The Lenten study has been put together by our new Bishop. Second, Reverend John is offering a time of reflection on the Gospel between the 8 and 9:30am services. This is a type of meditation or prayer that many find helpful. Third, our worship becomes simpler over Lent. We don't say or sing the Gloria, we take out the flowers, we don't say or sing alleluias, and we are encouraged to fast, to do acts of mercy and to give to the poor. In all these things we are examining our hearts where Jesus says all good and all evil really comes from. We are putting our motivations under the spotlight. We are travelling more lightly for a time in order that we might follow Jesus into the desert where his motivation was sorely tested.

Strangely it has become very trendy to give things up. Marie Kondo on Netflix is encouraging people to give things away. She invited watchers of her show to ask the question, "Does this possession bring you joy?" At least one parishioner I know is following this religiously giving away the number of things based on the number of the day of the month. So on the 24th she gave away 24 things, and on the 25th 25, you get the idea. The garage sale has done very well out of her. Secretly I'm a bit worried if my wife Rosemary watches this show and asks herself the question "What is it that is lying around the house that doesn't bring me joy?" I'm worried that I might find myself in the wheelie bin!

I wonder what would help you live a life of greater joy. What is it that by giving it up you can find more contentment? I want to suggest one thing based on today's reading. What would it be like to give up on judging others? I know this is something I could grow from too. Kiwis are especially bad at this, we love to criticise others.

One group we especially like to complain about are our leaders. I was shocked to discover that when Norman Kirk was our Prime Minister he was at home lying in bed very seriously ill on the night he died, a man rang up to abuse him every hour on the hour. He told him he was a fat... well you get the picture. Is it little wonder that you can't find the prime minister's phone number in the phone book anymore. I once wrote an article about treating our politicians as human beings in the local paper. I had a phone call later that day from a family member of one of the cabinet ministers to thank me and to tell me how much pressure she felt under. I sometimes remember to ask myself the question, if the person we are talking about joined the conversation would I say the same things, and sadly almost always the answer is no.

Another great truth that Jesus is alluding to is that the speech we can't stand in another is probably the very thing we can't face in ourselves.

Jesus offers us this life-giving advice because as we learn to be more accepting of others something mysterious happens to us. We begin to discover that grace that we all

long for. Self acceptance. The possibility of learning to live gently and lovingly with ourselves. To be truly at home in ourselves is one of the great gifts of today's gospel.

There is after all only one person that you are always with, one person that is your constant companion, if you haven't already, it's high time to start loving that person. Maybe this is the gift this year's Lent holds out to you.