Dwight L. Moody, the famous evangelist . . . once admitted, “I have more trouble with myself than with any other person I have ever met.”¹ That’s a pretty darn honest thing to say. I offer it as a stand-alone and universal truth well worth our reflection this morning.

As if to also confess that when it comes right down to it the troubles that any of us have with other people, named or not, usually have something to do with the troubles that we have with or within ourselves. In fact, it’s almost a dead-ringer that what we don’t like in other people is what we don’t like in ourselves first. Simply to see it mirrored on another face and by another name is just plain irksome. And it’s always easier to judge the other than to know our own part in this larger truth.

“Ohoooooo! Jimminee! Cripes! I just hate it when she does that!” I wonder: do you know what I mean?

So Jesus has this teaching for us . . . a golden nugget from the 7th chapter of Matthew – which also tells us that it’s a part of the Gospel we know as the Sermon on the Mount. He was such an amazing teacher. His insight and understanding of human life in all of its twists and tur n were phenomenal. In this instance he only used something like 71 words, depending on the translation, and he hits the target spot-on.

“Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment that you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure that you get.” Bulls-eye! Or in another more playful translation, “Don’t pick on people, jump on their failures, criticize their faults – unless, of course, you want the same treatment. The critical spirit has a boomerang to it!”²

Jesus still and again. “Why do you see the speck in your neighbor’s eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye? Or how can you say to your neighbor, ‘let me take the speck of your eye,’ while the log is in your own eye?” Or that more playful frolic again, “It’s easier to see a smudge on your neighbor’s face and be oblivious to the ugly sneer on your own.”

This is so apropos to life in real-time. It speaks to the very heart of human relationship and behavior. Please. No offence. No judgment. Just saying. Honestly, isn’t it true that most all of us are pretty quick to offer our judgment of others without the courtesy of even knowing the whys and wherefores of their story or circumstance? I’m not sure of a softer way to say it. This teaching of Jesus does a stellar job in being so singular, so universal and so true.

Nearly a generation ago . . . a man named Stephen Covey wrote a bestseller by the title The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People.³ In it he tells this story.
“It happened on a New York subway one Sunday morning. People were sitting quietly – some reading newspapers, some lost in thought, some resting their eyes. It was a calm and peaceful scene. Then suddenly a man and his children entered the subway car. The kids were so loud and rambunctious. The whole climate instantly changed from serene to chaotic.”

Covey goes on, “The man sat down next me and closed his eyes, apparently oblivious to the situation. And then it got worse, the kids were yelling back and forth, even throwing things. I was getting ready to blow a gasket. It was incredibly annoying. But still the man did nothing.”

“It was so difficult. I could not believe that this young father could be so insensitive as to let his children run wild like that and take no responsibility at all. I finally spoke up and said, ‘You know your kids are completely out of control.’”

“The man lifted his gaze as if to come into consciousness of the situation for the first time and said softly, ‘I’m sorry. You’re right. We are just coming home from the hospital where their mother died about an hour ago. We are in a fog. I don’t know what to do or think, and I guess they don’t know how to handle it either.’”

**Jesus again . . .** and this is pure unaltered Rabbinic teaching. Although Jewish teaching in Jesus’ day contained exhortations about toleration, moderation and mercy the absolute prohibition of judgment, person-to-person, stands alone without parallel. And in fact the only kind of judgment that ever had any merit, and the only Source of judgment that mattered, was that which would come from the heart of God.4

So whether the judgment that we may occasion ourselves into is the kind that comes from projecting our own stuff on another; or, as in the case with Steven Covey, grounded in making incorrect assumptions about the story, behavior or life of another person – Jesus says no. Just no. Don’t do it. “Judge not, lest you too be judged.”

Rachel Naomi Remen is a medical doctor and a healer of souls. She wrote one of the best books ever, a collection of her thoughts under the title *My Grandfather’s Blessings.*5 And among her many insights are these words: “The life in us is diminished by judgment far more frequently than by disease. Our own self-judgment or the judgment of other people can completely stifle our life force, its spontaneity and natural expression.”

Boy is that ever true! We all know its toxin when we see it, whether received ourselves, or sent from us to another. And here’s another thing about it. We don’t even have to speak or use words to release its negative power. A simple glance will do. A nuance. The silent treatment. Judgments cast in whatever way can ruin a day, or destroy a season, or darken a life.
So, my friends, that’s all . . . for today, this fourth Sunday in Lent. As if it’s not plenty or enough for the whole of Lent!

If it fits anywhere for you this morning, this week, this chapter of life - take it to heart. And if it doesn't, hold the thought, put it in your pocket, for you will surely find a time to visit its wisdom again.

It’s a stand-alone, singular, time-worn Rabbinic lesson from the heart of Jesus, pure and perfect, these weeks that lead us to Easter. In whose name I say, amen.

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