

1 Today we're continuing to explore what it means for us to be Jesus followers in the 21st century. Not just church attenders and members, but sold-out, Spirit-filled followers of the Lord of Life! Everything that we're about in this life vitally depends on the answer to one question: "Is Jesus real to me?" This month we're answering that question by asking 21 questions that John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement, first asked. If you haven't yet received one of the take-home cards with Wesley's 21 questions, you'll find one in plastic card holder on the back of the pew in front of you. Take it home and use it during this season of spiritual growth. My prayer is that by the end of our series, each of us can say that Jesus is more real to us than ever.

2 Our question for today is a long one, but it's really not a complicated idea. "Do I thank God that I am not as other people, especially the Pharisees, who despised the tax collectors." What John Wesley had in mind, of course, was that same reading we heard earlier from the Gospel of Luke. A modern paraphrase of his question might be this: "Do I compare myself to other people, and in so doing do I judge them, and decide that I'm better than they are?"

So how about it? Do you? Do you judge other people and find that you usually see yourself as holding the moral high ground? It's not as if we haven't read and heard about the various things Jesus had to say about judging others. For example, in Matthew 7: "Do not judge others, and you will not be judged. For you will be treated as you treat others. The standard you use in judging is the standard by which you will be judged."² I like that verse even better 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."³ How about this one from John 8: "Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone."⁴ So we know that is wrong to judge others, but judge we do. Why is that?

¹ Sermon series concept adapted from Adam Hamilton, COR

² Matthew 7:1-2. New Living Translation (2nd ed.)

³ Matthew 7:1-2. *The Message*

⁴ John 8:7. New Revised Standard Version

3 When my children were growing up, I had a terrible habit of judging other parents. I'd see neighborhood children riding their bikes without helmets and without a second thought I'd shake my head and say, "What's wrong with their parents? Those kids are going to wind up in the emergency room!" Are there any parents or grandparents here who want to confess to the same affliction? I wish I could say that I did that primarily out of loving concern for the children. I suspect, however, that lurking underneath some of that judgment was the desire to elevate myself and the idea that I was not only a good parent, but I was a better parent. So, when you're tempted to pronounce judgment on someone, ask yourself: "Am I thinking or saying this so that I can appear or feel better?"

Let's say for the sake of argument that my intentions in judging the other neighborhood parents were as pure as possible, that I was genuinely motivated by a loving concern for the welfare of the children. Jana and I have friends with a young family that completely fills a minivan. From time to time, one or the other of the parents would sometimes pop into the church I served to say hello while leaving the children locked in the running van. Yikes! We regularly had people breaking into vehicles in our church parking lot, and knowing and loving those children as I did, I was concerned for them. But here's the thing. I was definitely also judging the parents, giving them a big red "F" for "fail" in the mental gradebook I carried around in my head and heart.

Most of us can probably agree that putting a bike helmet on our kids is a good idea, and that leaving our children alone in a running van is a bad idea. And even if you don't agree with me, there's nothing wrong with forming a judgment on, or having a debate over, what's the best way for us to raise our kids. The problem comes when we start attaching the worth of our ideas and positions to the worth of other people.

4 Isn't that exactly what's happened to our country politically? Whether you live in a blue state or a red state, the truth is that every state is purple, every state includes people with different political perspectives and histories. We've become so closely aligned with our political perspectives that it's all but impossible to disagree with someone in a discussion about politics without tempers flaring. Jana and I are heading to our son's wedding next week and we've already talked about how we might diffuse some of the anticipated conflicts

between the red and blue factions within the extended family. That's sad. As followers of Jesus, we're called to look at people the way God does, to look beyond the politics, beyond the way we live, and even beyond the sin. Does that mean we all have to shup up and put up with anything? Of course not. We can agree to disagree about politics, about parenting, about sexuality, and even about what constitutes sin. In fact, those are all good things for us to talk about, debate, and discern together. Created in the image of God, we were all created to form judgments about how we live and how we live together. But we were never created to shut people out and shut them down, to assign a value to people that makes us look or feel better and relegates them to the status of "unclean."

5 If not judgment, then what? It always come down to love, doesn't it? Listen to this familiar passage from 1 Corinthians, Chapter 13, with new ears. You've mostly heard it at weddings- and it's a fine wedding text, but its message is for all of us of who want to learn to lay down the burden of trying to judge everyone else. I'm reading today from The Message.

{Read 1Corinthians 13: 4-8, 13 (MSG)}

Love is really the only thing that can teach our hearts not to judge. We learn that love from Jesus, who wants us to experience God's love for us so that we can share it with others. We're going to close with a video today about what that might look like, if we allowed our hearts of judgement to melt and be replaced with hearts of love. It could be a world where we speak-up for those who don't have a voice; where we're kind to others, because their day quite possibly was worse than ours; where we love with our words as well as our actions; where we go last so that another can go first; where we deliberately seek out the person without a friend. In summary, a world where our hearts are filled with love instead of judgment would be a world where we become Jesus to everyone, not just a few select someones.

Let's watch the video, after which I invite you to take a minute of reflection time.

{Play DVD: *The Jesus Memo*, 2:55}

Buffalo United Methodist Church

...serving people for Jesus Christ so that we all may know joy!

**609 8th Street NW
Buffalo, MN 55313
763-682-3538**

Bill Reinhart, Pastor
pastorbill@buffaloumc.com