

Practicing Resurrection
A New Way of Meeting People
Matthew 7:1-5

Do you remember the old days, when you used to go places and buy things? Often, as soon as you completed a transaction, somebody asked you a little survey—by email, or on your phone, sometimes when you were standing right there at the how you felt about it. You'd **get** cash register. You'd get a request for your opinion about the person who just helped you, or the product you just purchased, or the meal you ate. Rate the hotel room you just stayed in. (You may not remember what a hotel is. It's a big building with lots of bedrooms in it, for people to sleep in when they travel away from home.) Even now, the very minute I've read the last word of my electronic book, I'm asked for a review. How many stars? Did you like it? Was it good? On every Facebook post: thumbs up or thumbs down? How many tomatoes did that movie rate? Every car repair, or trip to Target, or Uber ride ends with a question: Was your experience satisfactory? Better than satisfactory? Slightly better, or a lot better?

Our culture invites us to make flash judgments about almost everything, from restaurant entrées to the performance of chefs who exhaust themselves baking desserts in record time. We are consumers. The power that comes with that role is that we are entitled—and sometimes expected—to judge the things that compete for our attention and our spending. We are encouraged all the time—multiple times a day, actually—to exercise our judgment muscles.

So no wonder we are inclined to judge other people. It's what our minds have been trained to do—quickly, often without even being aware that's what we're doing. I like that person's hair. I wouldn't wear that clothing combination. That was a good comment she just made; his was a little off-topic. We size someone up the first time a political comment comes out of their mouth; from very small clues we can evaluate their taste, their intelligence, their moral fiber. We're good at this. We've had a lot of practice.

Richard Rohr says this is the natural downward spiral of the ego: instinctively, we compare, and then we compete, and then we criticize. We know who we are by how we measure up against others.

Don't do that, Jesus said. Stop judging other people. It's corrosive to your soul, your humanity.

I don't think Jesus meant that we should turn off our capacity to recognize right and wrong. It would be a mistake to read Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount as 'It's all good.' It's not all good; there are plenty of things that happen in the world that deserve judgment, and even condemnation. But people? 'I've got this one,' God says to us. 'I can take care of sifting out the good ones from the bad ones.'

Jesus gives us this memorable little metaphor about being so bothered by the speck in someone else's eye, that we think it's our job to remove it, while there's a giant log in our own eye that makes it impossible for us to see anything clearly. Our perspective is flawed; we can't see either

ourselves or anyone else accurately. This would be a bad time for us to try eye surgery on somebody else. To think that we are qualified—clear-eyed enough—to judge how they are living their lives.

There's a heaviness that settles over us when our inclination to make judgments gets the better of us, when it becomes the sharp edge of our character, when we look at other people through narrow judgmental slits in our eyes. In these weeks of focus on Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, it has struck me that over and over again, maybe the point Jesus was trying to make was about humility: living lightly, not being weighed down by anger or resentment or worry, or caught in that spiral of comparing, competing, criticizing. Refraining from judgments that are not ours to make.

The Quaker teacher Parker Palmer uses this rule—a touchstone, he calls it—for conversations in small groups: *When the going gets rough, turn to wonder*. What he means by that is, when someone says something that strikes you as strange, instead of thinking “What’s wrong with that person?” look inside yourself and ask, “I wonder why that bothered me. What’s inside of me that is keeping me from wanting to understand, leaning toward that person with empathy and love?”

Maybe especially now, when there is so much heaviness in the world—fear and sickness and uncertainty—the best thing we can do is to give up our judging ways and live with lightness and wonder.

In all the creativity and funny stuff that has risen to the surface and made us more human in these last two months, I hope you've seen John Krasinski's *Some Good News* that's appeared on YouTube every Sunday evening. There's a wide-open humility in the way he's gathered people together around kindness and joy in the midst of a terrible time. Sometimes it's just funny.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TXdKrtmexWU>

(9:38 - 10:39)

And sometimes it's so full of heart, that it reminds you what a gift it is to be alive, even now.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TXdKrtmexWU>

(14:38-19:33)

There is goodness and joy everywhere around us. May your eyes be clear enough to see it.