

## OUR TENDANCY TO JUDGE

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The pace quickened as Jesus and his followers drew nearer to the Holy City of Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city to which all Jewish men whatever country they lived in dreamed to visit at least once in their lifetime. It was the home of the famous Temple of Solomon, though in ruins for decades and home of the rebuilt Temple of King Herod. It was the very centre of the Jewish faith and the city that housed it was deemed to be sacred.

Jerusalem was located on key trade routes through the Middle East and therefore was an economic centre as well as a religious centre. Roman conquerors located their governor there to keep an eye on the trade and to see to it that the Jews kept themselves peaceful.

So here it was, another Jewish Passover High Festival about to take place and Jerusalem was full of pilgrims. The city pulsed with business people hoping to cash in on the crowds desire for trinkets, souvenirs, lambs for a sacrifice, rooms to sleep in and restaurants to provide food for the visitors. In short, the city pulsed with activity and excitement.

Jesus and his followers were on the road towards Jerusalem. In spite of the fear of those around Jesus for his safety, Jesus steadfastly moved on towards Jerusalem and the Feast of the Passover celebrations.

Jesus and the others were only too well aware that their every step and act was being monitored both by those who loved Jesus and by those who feared or hated him. Jesus steadfast moving towards Jerusalem was not without activity along the way. It was not a march but a walk forward in the direction of the Holy City.

John's Gospel tells of events in Bethany in the week before Passover. Jesus came to the house of Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha. You will recall that Jesus had raised Lazarus back to life when his two sisters had pleaded for help to Jesus a year before.

Jesus sat down before they ate and Mary came and washed his feet with costly perfumes. Judas Iscariot, one of the disciples, the same who betrayed Jesus, was merciless on Mary for her waste of money. As the treasurer of the Disciples' common money bag, he knew how far the money Mary had spent on the perfume could have been used on other good deeds where there was real need.

Judas was incredibly quick to judge Mary and her lavish show of devotion. Jesus looked at the righteous anger exhibited by Judas and cautioned him to leave her alone and not to diminish her act of devotion. I will not always be here with you he said but human needs will always be here. So leave her alone Judas. We can still hear Judas muttering to himself after this rebuke.

Another passage from Luke's Gospel is of a further incident along the walk to Jerusalem. The religious leaders were trying to trap Jesus in a way that would allow them to deliver

Jesus to the Romans to be once and for all put away or preferably executed. They ask Jesus if it is lawful for them to give tribute to Caesar or not? This is a good question they had decided for surely Jesus will fall into the trap and condemn himself. Show me a coin orders Jesus. They do so. He asks whose likeness or face is on it? Caesar's they replied. Then said Jesus: "render to Caesar the things that are Caesars and render to God the things that are God's." Amazed by his words, they melt away to regroup yet another day.

All along the path to Jerusalem, Jesus encountered the judgment of others. The Jewish religious leaders were enraged by Jesus' assertion that he was the Son of God. Though Jesus never directly said he was the Son of God, they resented the way Jesus spoke so surely about God and God's impatience with meaningless acts of devotion that did not lead to generous lives shared with those around them.

How dare he not rebuke his followers when they claim Jesus as the long awaited Messiah. God would never come to earth in the way the followers claim. He must be a phony and therefore worthy only of execution.

You recall the many times Jesus was taken to task by others for eating meals with Gentiles and sinners. Surely a true Messiah would follow all the rules and refrain from fraternizing with the unwashed and the unclean.

Our tendency to judge quickly and often harshly is a common human trait. We expect from others a level of conduct and truthfulness we are unable to achieve for ourselves. We feel somehow enhanced by putting down others. Perhaps we too stand aside as did the Pharisees and say: thank God I am not like that man or woman over there. We judge so easily.

Think again on the story of the woman found to be an adulteress by a crowd who were dragging her out to the town outskirts to stone her to death. They look to Jesus to see if he condones her activities. Jesus turns the tables on the crowd. He does not condone the woman's acts but puts forward this proposition. If you are planning to stone her, Jesus said, go ahead but let the man or woman who is without sin and blameless before God and his or her neighbours cast the first stone. The people gathered look from one to another and gradually melt away. The woman was left alone with Jesus. Where are your accusers Jesus asked? Go now and sin no more.

The Holy Week is full of judgment aimed fully at Jesus by those around him. There was the crowd in Jerusalem which only a couple of days after greeting Jesus so enthusiastically with palm branches and cries of Hosanna when asked by Pilate if he should release Jesus or the murderer Barabbas shouted for Barabbas. By this time the crowd wanted the death of Jesus and shouted loudly for Barabbas. Can you imagine asking for a murderer over a man of peace? Yes, if you wanted more from Jesus than he was prepared to deliver. He did not meet our expectations. So get on with it. Crucify him!! How dare he let us down? So much for our hopes and dreams!

Judas Iscariot, one of the chosen twelve disciples, grew frustrated with Jesus' unwillingness to raise an army and rebel against Roman occupation. In Judas' judgment this man Jesus had everything going for him. Why will he not use his popularity and become king of a new Israel? Judas judged Jesus now to be unworthy of his confidence and so he sold his loyalty to Jesus in betrayal for 30 pieces of silver to the leaders who wanted him dead. I wasted three years following this man. He got me so excited for I knew he was the messiah who was to lead Israel back to glory as in King Solomon's day. Instead, Jesus blew it and no longer deserves my loyalty.

The Roman authorities had been worried about Jesus for three years. They judged him to be dangerous. They knew he upset the religious elite in the area and that made them nervous. If the religious leaders were stirred up, then they would stir up the population. To Rome, this always spelled trouble. Every Roman governor assigned to Israel had a rough time trying to please anyone. It was not a popular place to be sent as governor.

The interesting thing here in this story of Jesus is the way the Roman authorities tried not to arrest Jesus. They felt Jesus had a raw deal from the religious leadership. They were far less judgmental against Jesus than were the religious leaders themselves.

Why is it we are so prone to judge those around us much more harshly than we judge ourselves? The sins and weaknesses of others fascinate us and allow us to righteously condemn them. What is our fascination with Hollywood stars? Why do we demand such an impossibly high standard from our politicians when both the media and we ourselves know we could never be as pure in thought and action as we demand of others?

So often I hear that all politicians are corrupt and only in politics to feather their own bed. My father was a politician and I saw the cost to one's own life and that of the family up close. Everyone assumed my father was on duty anywhere at anytime including after Sunday service. He understood the price tag of service and gave so much of himself. However, to many folk it was never enough.

Do you listen to the open line shows in this community or other communities in which you have resided? My grandfather used to have two sayings about these shows which I always remember. They may not be fair judgments but they were his clear opinion. He called them "open mouth shows." He also said that most of the open line program where folk called in with their opinions was "a pooling of ignorance."

Whatever we may think of this, it indicates how easy it is for us to judge others. It also indicates that these judgments draw people to listen. Gossip, innuendo, whispers of possible scandal and sexual misdeeds fascinate most of us. A program based only on good and sweet things lose something very quickly and that something is the audience. Judging others; it is so much a part of who we are no matter how hard we try to curb it.

Judge not lest you be judged yourself. Most of us have heard this saying all our life. It is easy to say; tough to follow. Innately we know the judging of others is not the way to go. None of us enjoy it when we hear others judge us or see in their eyes disdain or

disapproval. It is hurtful and damaging when we experience it. Why is it so hard for us to remember this when we show our disapproval of others for whatever the reason.

As we continue our pilgrimage to the cross with Christ, as we walk towards Jerusalem, we will sense disapproval, we will experience people's anger and cruel comments, we will feel for Jesus being the butt of the taunts and shouts. Yet we will note that Jesus pointed his face steadfastly to Jerusalem in spite of the dangers ahead and certain death.

Paul, the great apostle and congregation teacher, warned the early Christians well after the resurrection of Jesus, that they had to be prepared for times which would be unpleasant because we proclaim our faith in God as we have known God through Jesus Christ. You will be judged harshly by the authorities, by the community and your neighbours. In all things remember that our Lord Jesus Christ himself experienced even worse in order to convince us of God's unerring love.

In today's world, people of faith who worship regularly are in a minority. People will look at us with wonder when we admit to being church attendees. Why do you do so they ask? What do you get out of it? How can you spend all that time in and commit your dollars to your church? This does not appear to be reasonable to the majority.

All of this is part of our pilgrimage to the cross. It causes us to rethink our faith and to renew our faith. As we follow Christ we sense again the great drama of God reaching out to men and women in love and joy. Knowing this, how can we not rejoice in the exercise of our faith within a fellowship of fellow faith seekers?

Max Lucado in his book *No Wonder They Call Him the Savior*, says this about the personal testimony of the Christian man or woman which may well affect the world just as the life and death of Jesus affected history. "Serenity in suffering is a stirring testimony. Anybody can preach a sermon on a mount surrounded by daisies. But only one with a gut full of faith can live a sermon on a mountain of pain." He was not recommending pain and suffering; he was trying to speak of the influence on us when we witness true serenity in tough times.

Thanks be to God for steadfast love, forgiveness and everlasting presence in our lives as we walk the pilgrimage to the cross with Christ and as we live out our faith in our daily lives. Rather than being judgmental and critical of others, may we stretch out our hands willingly and eagerly to grasp a fellow traveler on a faith journey to the cross of Christ.

Amen