

Read John 3:16-21

No one likes to be judged; especially me. But the reality is I am judged every day. I am judged by others, by myself; by those who don't know me and by those who know me all too well.

When I am judged I tend to get defensive. Even when the judging is meant to be constructive; I resist judgment, even fighting back to justify why I did what I did.

And even though I don't like to be judged; the truth is I find myself judging others. Actually, come to think about it, I like to judge others; and I bet you do as well.

We often coat our judgment in platitudes of concern; after all we want the best for others- or at least that is what we tell ourselves. Truth be told; most people outside the church tell us that the reason they avoid the church is because as Christians we tend to be so judgmental. Guilty as charged!

But there is something about judgment that is also attractive to most people. And reality TV has fed that insatiable appetite for judgment.

Remember when American Idol first came on TV several years ago; we were captivated by the truth-telling of Simon Cowel. Sure he was brutally honest with contestants who shouldn't even be allowed in a pig-calling contest; but Simon was telling the truth; and we liked the way he judged.

I believe that we are actually attracted to truth-tellers; attracted because deep down we all want to experience truth. Deep down we want truth because we know that *truth sets us free to experience life in its fullest.*

Unfortunately, truth-telling is a rare experience in our culture. You don't have to look any further than the presidential election to know that truth-telling is rare!

But what would happen if we would start seeking truth; if we sought out truth rather than being resistant to the truth. What would happen if instead of being judgmental, or harsh, we allowed the truth to judge us in a way that is helpful and just?

Earlier you heard the passage from John 3:16-21; in which John lays out the reality that we would prefer to remain in the dark rather than to allow the light to reveal the truth of our life. What he is saying is that we would rather resist the light of the truth and stumble around in the dark than to allow the light to shine the truth in our lives and reveal the areas that need to be exposed to judgment.

What I want to focus our attention on today is how Jesus, who is the light of truth, comes into all our lives to serve as a judge- not to condemn us as John 3:17 affirms- but

to speak truth into the darkness of our lives and *set us free to experience the fullness of life* Jesus wants for all people.

Before we go any further I want to stress something very important about Jesus as judge. Jesus doesn't judge in a manner that is harsh; but he speaks the truth in the context of a loving relationship because he wants to help us experience all the joy that life has to offer us.

Remember the story of Jesus and the woman who was caught in adultery (John 8). When the harshly judgmental Pharisees drug her in front of Jesus they wanted to stone the woman-that's the negative side of judgment. But how did Jesus respond? He acted out of grace and spoke the truth to both the Pharisees and the woman. To the Pharisees Jesus said, let him who is without sin cast the first stone; and to the woman, go and sin no more.

Jesus' truth-telling, or judgment, is meant to happen in the context of helping us *experience the fullness of life*. And likewise, truth-telling should always occur in the context of a loving relationship.

Think about it this way. How often do you walk up to a total stranger and ask them to pass judgment on how you look, or to critique something you did or said? For most of us we would never ask a stranger to pass judgment on us. No, if we want someone to tell us the truth we want it to come from someone we trust; someone with whom we have an intimate relationship. We should be able to do that because they love us; they want the best for us and because judgment is always best received in an intimate relationship.

Judgment is a part of intimacy. And judgment is best expressed and received within the context of intimate relationships. This is why friends can be brutally honest with one another and not get upset; because they know that the other person's words are spoken in love with a desire to help and not hinder the person.

I think this is why so many people outside the church only experience the church as a harsh, judgmental, condemning institution. Rather than speaking the truth in love; rather than being in a relationship from which one can share truth in the context of helping another person to *experience the fullness of life*; the church has been seen as negative, condemning and judgmental.

Rather than casting stones; Christians should learn from Jesus that it is far better to err on the side of grace and let the light of truth do its work than thinking it is up to us to judge others.

But let's come back to what the scriptures clearly say about Jesus. Jesus is judge; judge, as Peter says in Acts 10:42, of both the living and the dead. We even affirm Jesus place as Judge in the Apostles' Creed.

But the fact is most people don't want to think about the implications of Jesus as Judge. But why are we so resistant to the truth-telling or judgment of Jesus?

I think we can find the answer to that in 2 Timothy 4 where Paul lays out the reasons we resist judgment. Listen to this passage: 2 Tim 4:1-4

We resist judgment because first of all we want to justify our own actions. We ignore the truth that is right in front of us and refuse to listen to sound teaching. You've heard people who say something like; "No one has the right to judge me." They isolate themselves from the truth in order to justify their own actions.

We resist judgment because we want to create our own truth. Notice that Paul says there will come a time when we will gather around ourselves teachers who say what we want to hear. I guess Paul knew that someday we would create 'yes-men' who would tell us what we want to hear, even if it wasn't the truth.

After a while Paul says that all that resistance will cause us to live in a false reality- a world of myths- a world of our creation.

The result of resisting the truth and accumulating for ourselves this false reality; is that we will eventually destroy ourselves- not overnight, but certainly over time and as a result *we will not experience the fullness of life that Jesus wants for all of us.*

So what are we to do with this idea that Jesus is judge? Remember the statement I made last week: **Who you believe Jesus is impacts your relationship with him.** If we believe Jesus is Judge it is going to impact our life!

Well it begins with inviting Jesus into our lives so that his truth can help us. I want you to remember something about Jesus; Jesus is a gentleman. Jesus doesn't intrude into our lives; Jesus waits patiently for our invitation to enter our lives and reveal the truth so that we can *experience the fullness and joy of life.*

How do you feel about physical exams? I know a lot of people avoid going to the doctor; they simply don't want someone to tell them the truth. They don't want to hear the doctor say: you need to lose weight, you need to stop smoking, you need to have a colonoscopy, and you need a blood test.

A lot of people avoid the doctor simply because they don't want to hear the truth! Likewise, a lot of people avoid Jesus simply because they don't want to hear the truth!

So what are we to do? We need to invite the Truth into our life. We need to give Jesus a place from which he can help us.

Remember that I mentioned earlier that judgment is a part of intimacy. I think the reason many people avoid the intimacy of a relationship with Jesus, the reason people avoid the intimacy of God's word, the reason people avoid the intimacy of small groups is because we are resistant to hearing the truth.

We want to do things our way; we want to create our own truth- live in our own fantasy land. But the further we go from the truth the further we go into darkness; and then fail *to experience life in its fullest*

So the challenge for all of us is to let the light begin to shine in our darkness. We need to accept the truth of Jesus words. We need to be challenged by the scriptures. We need the encouragement of intimate relationships with other disciples. If we are willing to let Jesus be Judge then His *truth sets us free to experience life in its fullest*

My question for you today is simple; where are you resisting the sound doctrine which Paul mentions to Timothy and instead, living a myth?

Some day we will all stand before Jesus and face up to the truth. Personally, I'd rather let the truth speak to me now as opposed to later.