

Why do you notice the splinter in your brother/sister's eye but do not perceive the wooden beam in your own?" Luke 6:41

Luke 6:37-45

First United Methodist Church, Baraboo

August 19, 2018

Pastor Marianne Cotter

The Bible never says "Jesus laughed." But to me, Jesus had a great sense of humor. His parables -- those short, pithy sayings Jesus told to get his main ideas across -- were often funny, surprising, absurd. How could faith the size of a tiny mustard seed move mountains? How could God's reign be compared to woman who puts yeast into a bunch of flour? In the ancient Jewish worldview, yeast was the definition of what is unholy; a woman was typically not a model of righteousness. And what about the ridiculous image in today's parable from Luke 6:39-42. "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, "Friend, let me take out the speck in your eye", when you yourself do not see the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor's eye."

As a carpenter Jesus knew about wood, about logs and slivers. Jesus said to his disciples and to all who want to follow him: you are like those who want to take the tiny sliver out of the eye of our neighbor but you don't notice the log that's in your own eye. We all have blind spots. Jesus was trying to make us smile at ourselves, admit how ridiculous we sometimes are -- thinking we are so good. It may be funny to think of a person with a log in their own eye and not be aware of it. But what's not funny is the effect that speck -- our sin -- can have on other people's lives.

Take Bill Hybels for instance. Here's someone who has done a tremendous amount of good in his life: the founding pastor of a huge in the Chicago suburb of South Barrington Willowcreek. He did ground breaking work in ministry -- bridging the divide between secular and religious worlds -- making the Christian faith accessible to a great many people -- using small groups as a key to faith development -- creating a multi-site ministry touching many thousands. His was a middle-of-the-road megachurch which allowed women to assume top leadership positions. But Bill Hybels could not see the log that was in his own eye.

When he stepped down in April it at first seemed like he was executing a well-planned retirement. But soon another story soon emerged. There were nine reports of sexual misconduct by Bill Hybels. Could this charismatic pastor really be guilty of such abuse? At first these reports were not adequately investigated by the church elders. It turns out there were allegations going back to the 1980's, stories of Bill Hybels acting inappropriately around female staff and at least one congregant.

Then, on August 8th the executive pastor Heather Larson and nine members of the board of elders resigned, admitting they at first failed to believe the women who accused Mr. Hybels. These resignations came as the church was starting its annual global leadership summit (a leadership event, broadcast to thousands of churches around the world). The Willow Creek global leadership event began with an apology by the president of the Willow Creek Association, Tom DeVries. "There is no map for the journey that we've been on. We've had missteps, mistakes, slip-ups, blunders," said . "We are sorry for the places where we could and should have done better." One participant at the summit, Alan Huizenga, who works for an evangelical publishing house put it this way: "I think everyone is still wounded and shocked.... Bill was so involved in the leadership summit. I feel bad the story has damaged the church as a whole, across the world. We're all failed people." There is now an independent investigation being done at Willowcreek, exploring what processes and safeguards need to be put into place to ensure nothing like this ever happens again.

The kind of sexual misconduct Bill Hybels is accused has devastating effects on the victims. When it is a spiritual leader committing these acts, one's relationship with God can be profoundly harmed. Evangelical leaders around the country are right to be concerned about the effect this scandal will have on the lives of people inside and outside the church. Many people will lose confidence in Willowcreek, in the church, in Christianity. Some will ask "Aren't they just a bunch of hypocrites anyway?"

Of course Christians being called hypocrites is nothing new. Jesus himself used the word. "You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor's eye." In the ancient Greek world a hypocrite was an actor: a hypocrite wasn't a bad thing, it was just someone who played a role and wore a mask. But in the Christian scripture, the word hypocrite became an insult. A hypocrite is a person who says one thing and does another. They get caught up in their role and can't see who they really are. Hypocrites are blind and they can't see the log in their own eye, can't see the wrong they are prone to.

I hesitated to even tell you Bill Hybels story today. It's so tempting to think the problem is "with those people." (however we define "those people"). But the problem is not "with those people." The problem is people, and we are one of them.

There's a Peanuts cartoon strip that shows Linus asking Lucy,

"Why are you so anxious to criticize me?"

Lucy responds, "I just think I have a knack for seeing other people's faults."

To that Linus snaps, "What about your own faults?"

Lucy in her self-righteousness responds, "I have a knack for overlooking them."

Throughout his ministry Jesus asked questions. He asked questions of the crowd, of his disciples, of the religious leaders of this day. Today's he asks us: **Why do you see the speck in your neighbor's eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye?** This comes right after Jesus warns us against judging others (the same warning is found in Matthew 7:7): 'Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven;...' (Luke 6:37 – 38) The idea of someone not being aware of the log in that is in their eye is funny; what's not funny is what happens when we judge others. When people come into church for the first time – they are often afraid of us. They are afraid we will judge them. Judge them for their clothes... judge them for being poor....judge them for looking different. Will there be people like me there?

J. Nicole Morgan was sixteen when she came to faith in Christ. It happened at a church camp. She was tempted to get baptized in the pool at that camp but she was too shy to ask. She started worrying about what would happen when she returned to her Baptist church back home. Writing in the August 1 issue of Christian Century magazine "I imagined myself climbing the short set of stairs into the baptismal pool with a white robe stretched tightly over my body, clinging to every roll of fat – a spectacle that would only be emphasized when I came out the other side, skin cold and wet with a newly translucent robe." She spent the remainder of camp, the bus ride home and the waiting days until the next Sunday wondering if her church had a baptismal robe big enough. Thankfully her church's largest robe wasn't as tight as she imagined. "Still, this sacramental moment, one of the most important for a Christian, was a very awkward day to be in my body." She goes on to say that she is not the only one with the fear that her church will exclude her through fat bias or structural barriers, or silent shaming. The feeling of being judged for any reason is not a good one. When we judge others, we can profoundly harm their souls and block their access to God, and to full participation in the body of Christ.

The problem of Judgmental Christians has been around for a long time. In the past and today, one solution is to pray a prayer of confession like the one we had today. Prayers of confession keep us humble Earlier we admitted following our own desires, our neglect of others... and asked for forgiveness for our sins. The words of Assurance gave us hope – that when we're honest with God and confess our sin, we receive forgiveness. Yes, it can feel like a rote exercise, just going through the motions. You may wonder "Didn't we just do this last week? Why do we have to do this again? And again?" The reason is that if we didn't, we'd forget about that log that is in our eye. We'd forget how in striving for the good and true that we can become judgmental. We'd forget we have faults we cannot see – God sees our faults and the people around us can see them too.

Here's something else that can help us the log out of our own eye: stories about people of faith Who don't take themselves too seriously. Who can get us to laugh at ourselves, like Jesus got people to laugh at themselves. and who are comfortable admitting their weaknesses; who freely admit they have moral blind spots. Some of those people were the Abbas and Ammas -- the desert fathers and mothers who went to the desert in north Africa in the 4th c. and 5th centuries of the common era to find God through living a very simple life, either alone or in small groups. They found that judging others interfered with their relationship with God. So learning to refrain from judging was a big part of their search for God. Here are a few stories:

A brother in Scetis committed a fault. A council was called to which Abba Moses was invited, but he refused to go to it. Then the priest sent someone to him, saying, 'Come, for everyone is waiting for you.' So he got up and went. He took a leaking jug and filled it with water and carried it with him. The others came out to meet him and said, "What is this, father?" The old man said to them, "My sins run out behind me, and I do not see them, and today I am coming to judge the errors of another." When they heard that, they said no more to the brother but forgave him.

A brother asked Abba Poemen, "If I see my brother sin, is it right to say nothing about it?" The old man replied, "Whenever we cover our brother's sin, God will cover ours; whenever we tell people about our brother's guilt, God will do the same about ours."

A brother sinned and the priest ordered him to go out of the Church; Abba Bessarion got up and went out with him, saying, "I, too, am a sinner."

Some old men came to see Abba Poemen and said to him, "When we see brothers who are dozing {at the synaxis,} (during worship) shall we rouse them so that they will be watchful?" He said to them, "For my part, when I see a brother who is dozing, I put his head on my knees and let him rest."

If a man has attained to that which the Apostle speaks of "to the pure, everything is pure," (Titus 1.15) he sees himself less than all creatures. A brother asked him, "How can I deem myself less than a murderer?" The old man said, When a man has really comprehend this saying, if he sees a man committing a murder he says, "He has only committed this one sin but I commit sins every day."

And finally, Abba Xanthias who said this about judging others. "A dog is better than I am, for he has love and he does not judge."

This maybe are a good place to end. What Abba Xanthias says has the feel of a parable: absurd, surprising, kind of funny. My dog is better than I am. My dog loves and does not judge. It sounds like something Jesus would say to get us to see ourselves more clearly.

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, "Friend, let me take out the speck in your eye", when you yourself do not see the log in your own eye? You hypocrite Marianne... .you hypocrite fill-in-your-name, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor's eye."

Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.