

“Judge Not” March 7, 2010

Running a hundred miles an hour in the wrong direction...boy can I sure identify with that. Well, it's good to be back in Indianapolis, and I'm pretty sure if American Airlines had anything to do with it, I'd still be a hundred miles in the wrong direction. For those who might not be familiar with what I am talking about, I just returned from Haiti last week, and many of you followed our trip on Facebook. I really want to thank those of you who followed us, and commented—it was very affirming and meaningful to know we were supported by your thoughts and prayers.

Anyway, back to American Airlines. If anyone here this morning works for American Airlines, or has friends or family who works for American...I have to say I'm sorry, but I had a really crummy experience traveling. Now, Haiti...Haiti was fantastic, the people, the experience...just fantastic. It was getting to and from Haiti, courtesy of American Airlines, that was the issue.

Every leg of the flight that could have been delayed was delayed...except one. My flight out of Indy was delayed by two hours. So when I got to Chicago I had to hoof it with my two carry-ons which was all of my video equipment and all of my clothes and provisions for the week, from one end of O'Hare to the other...only to get to the gate a sweating, heaving, ruffled mess to find out the flight to Miami had also been delayed. Well, at least I made the flight...that was the good news. The bad news was that I didn't get into Miami until about 2:00 am. By the time I got off the plane and into the airport it was 2:30, and I had to be back at the airport at 5:00 am, so I just pulled up a nice piece of carpet and “slept” there. When the rest of the team showed up after a good night sleep in a Miami hotel, they got a really good laugh at my haggard appearance.

Well, the fun didn't end there. We had a great experience in Haiti and there will undoubtedly be more stories to come in the future from our experience there, but it was the return trip that I want to share with you this morning. So, our team is sitting in the hastily reconstructed airport in Port-au-Prince playing cards in the sweltering 90 degree heat...no air conditioner. This is the

part where I actually start talking about what I'm supposed to be talking about this morning...judgment.

The Bible passage we have this morning is seemingly pretty clear and speaks for itself. Let me share it with you:

“Do not judge, so that you may not be judged. For with the judgment you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. 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, “Let me take the speck out of your eye”, while the log is 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.”(NRSV)

I'll come back to that in a bit, but first let me take you back to the time immediately after the earthquake in Haiti. Do you recall the story about the particular religious group that was attempting to take 33 Haitian children out of the country without official permission? The entire group was arrested, some were eventually let go...the leaders were kept. This led to a whole lot of conversation in and out of religious groups...in and out of the media. The day before I left, there was an article in the New York Times that painted a less than flattering picture of faith-based groups doing work in Haiti. In order to legitimize their own work, and to somehow distance themselves from this group that was trying to take the babies out groups were saying...“well, we've been here longer...we are more legitimate than you are, etc.” The truth of the matter is that missionary zeal around the globe has given many people of faith trying to do legitimate, good work a bad name.

It has been my personal experience in other places I have traveled, identifying oneself as a Christian comes with baggage, and dare I say...with judgment. In trips to India, Kenya and Guatemala I have been counseled to downplay any “missionary-type” intention because of the ugly legacy of colonial-Christianity in those countries. As such, I have learned to keep a low profile, and an attitude that I will learn more than I teach and be blessed more than I bless.

With that as a background, let me share the scene in the Port-au-Prince airport. Like you already know, our group is playing cards waiting for our flights. This time, I had the last laugh

because my flight left 3 hours earlier than the rest of the group. Anyway, another group came up from the security area into the terminal area...must have been 30 of them...all wearing yellow t-shirts. My judgment radar began to go up immediately. As I looked closely at the t-shirts, it so happens that it was the same denominational group that had attempted to get the children out of Haiti without permission. Moreover, it was a particular branch within that denomination whose theological positions are far less inclusive than our tradition. As such, my judgment radar was on high alert.

Finally it was time for me to board the plane. I laughingly bid my group farewell, and got on the plane. I'll give you one guess...one guess, where my seat was? Umm hmm, that's right, smack-dab in the middle of the yellow shirts. I guess I didn't realize God worked as a reservations specialist with American Airlines! Soooo, that is why I'm dressed like *this*. This is what I was wearing...doing my best to keep a low profile. Never mind the fact that I'm not a plane talker anyway, in this case, I just wanted to put my headphones on, zone out, and get to Miami unscathed.

"Hey bud, what were you doing in Haiti?" uh oh, It was my yellow-shirted friend from Louisiana. "Hey, bud..." Okay, let me get my headphones off. One of my favorite tactics as a non-plane talker is to look really annoyed, dodge the question and redirected it...which I did. Tell ME, what were you doing in Haiti. "Well, we were there to tell people about Jesus Christ. Our conference sponsors several churches in Haiti and we were there to take care of those church members who had lost their homes." He went on, and on about that and I thought I was off the hook. Finally, he persisted and said directly, "you never did say what you do and why you were there."

Okay, moment of truth...Umm, I'm a United Methodist pastor from Indiana and I was there to help deliver supplies, provide shelter and *learn* (and yes, I was intentional about this last part)...and learn from the Haitians about their deep relationship with God. Oh boy...body language. He straightened up in his seat, and his body stiffened, but before this little sparing match went any further, I said...you know what,

you didn't tell me about you...do you have family. He kind of stopped dead in his tracks, cocked his head...yeah...wife, two kids. Oh yeah? Me too. How old are your kids? Now what do you do? As it turns out, he had come to Haiti because he believed God had nudged him and said go...couldn't explain exactly why...just go. Yeah...me too, I said. We talked for another half hour or so and both realized we had far more in common than either one of us would have wanted to admit.

As it turned out, we ended up walking together from the plane to customs, when we parted each other's company, we gave each other a big hug. As it turns out, we both kind of experienced the essence of today's Bible passage...**Why do you see the speck in your neighbor's eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye?** Right...both of us almost missed the broader essence of the other because we were so focused on only a narrow part of the story...focused on the "speck. Now, you are probably thinking this is a good place to end this saga...it may be, but thanks to American Airlines, there is part 2. To make a long story short, I got to Miami just fine, but I couldn't get OUT of Miami...you guessed it, flight delay. I was supposed to go from Miami to St. Louis, and St. Louis to Indianapolis. However, because of the delay, I showed up at the boarding counter in St. Louis, sweating and out of breath at 5:33—the ONLY flight in the whole itinerary that left on time, left for Indianapolis at 5:27. I don't have time to tell you all the details, but the bottom line is, I was stuck in St. Louis and couldn't get home. As such, American put me up in a hotel so I could wait for a flight the next day.

Finally at about 8:00 I got settled in and was very hungry, so I went downstairs to the Friday's in the hotel to get some carryout. I went up to the bar and placed my order and was waiting when this guy comes up next to me. He too wanted to place a to-go order. BUT, his order was a bit complicated, and the guy couldn't understand him. The Friday's guy was getting really agitated because the customer wanted a vegetarian dish—moreover though, he was from India and was very difficult to understand. I felt really bad for the Indian guy because he was getting no help...far from it. So after he ordered his food...there we were. Did I mention I'm also not a restaurant talker either?!

Again, so there we were, but I couldn't help but break my own rule and initiate a conversation

with this guy because I felt so bad for the way he was treated. “So did you miss your flight too?” He said yes, but immediately went on the offensive...turning the table on me. “So sir, why were you in Haiti, what do you do.” Well, I am a United Methodist pastor from Indiana. “Oh, a Christian.” Yes. You could see his judgment radar go up...clear as day. He asked me a few prodding questions, and it became readily apparent to him that I didn’t fit his preconceived notion of who he thought I should be, or how he assumed I would respond to his “religious” questions. I said, you are a Hindu, right? He was surprised I would know that. He said, what do you know about MY religion...I proceeded to share the modest understanding I have of Hinduism.

What ensued was one of the most engaging, authentic and enlightening faith conversations I’ve had in a long while. I am 100% convinced if he ever gets to Indianapolis, he will come check us out here at The Garden. He just couldn’t believe it was possible to have such an open conversation with a person of a different faith tradition. If you were here last week, you know that Linda spent some time talking about this very thing.

Christianity is the path that most of us here are familiar with relative to our understanding of God. Christianity is my path—it is how I understand God—it is the lens through which my faith is expressed—specifically the very Methodist lens which holds up scripture, tradition, reason and experience as the primary means by which we engage our culture.

However, judgment...it is judgment that so often prevents us from engaging others outside our faith tradition...engaging those who vote differently than we do...engaging those who may look different than we do...those whose sexual orientation may be different than ours. Never in a million years would I have purposely scripted my return trip from Haiti as it happened. However, like I said, I have a feeling God is employed by American Airlines...when God-filled incidences happen...we call them God-incidences. I am every so thankful for my return trip from Haiti, and now wouldn’t trade the experience for anything in the world. It was such a powerful reminder for me that that what we see is far more than what meets the eye.

[Song: Behind the Scenes](#)

[Video: Invention of Lying](#)

[Close Pt. 1: Intro Father Joseph—Haiti](#)

[Video: Father Joseph](#)

CLOSING:

I almost forgot to tell you. Sunday morning when I finally got to fly out for home...guess who was flying out of the same gate...just one flight earlier. Yep, my friend from Friday’s the night before. We gave each other a big hug, and he introduced me to his family...”Dear, this is the man I was telling you about.” Thank you God. Have a great Sunday. Go in peace.