

Living by a Fault Line

12 March 2006

Bible passage: **Luke 6:41-42** (CEV)

“You can see the speck in your friend’s eye. But you don’t notice the log in your own eye. How can you say, “My friend, let me take the speck out of your eye,” when you don’t see the log in your own eye? First get the log out of your own eye. Then you can see how to take the speck out of your friend’s eye.”

Sermon nugget: What’s going on when we’re so quick to criticize and blame others for their faults? Maybe we should take a good honest look at ourselves before we fault others.

I heard a story about a boss who was talking to his administrative assistant about one of the other employees. He said, “This guy has such a bad memory, it’s a wonder he remembers to breathe. I asked him if he would mind picking up a paper for me on his way back from lunch, but I’m not even sure he’ll remember his way back to the office!”

Just then, the guy in question rushed through the door, smiling a huge smile. “Guess what, boss?” he said. “At lunch I ran into someone who hadn’t given us an order in 7 years. Before he left, I talked him into a million dollar contract!” The boss sighed, looked at his assistant and said, “What did I tell you? He forgot the newspaper!”

Or how about the writer who told about going on vacation with his young son? The boy was mischievous and difficult to manage for the first few days, and his dad was on him all the time to straighten up and behave himself. The father made it clear to his son that no son of his was going to act that way!

Later on in the week, the boy tried especially hard to do better, and his father didn’t have to correct him one single time! As the child got into bed, after saying his prayers, he looked up at his father and his lip started to quiver. “What’s wrong?” Dad asked. “Daddy, haven’t I been a good boy today?” That’s when the father realized that he hadn’t had to discipline his son all day, but...

Do you see a common bond between these two stories? Is there anything going on there that any of us understand, perhaps all too well? Sometimes, we’re pretty quick to criticize and find fault with everything that’s wrong in another person, and we’re pretty slow to offer compliments or positive affirmations for the good things. Maybe that’s human nature, but it does seem to be something that’s a problem for many of us.

That’s really what Jesus is talking about in the Bible passage we have for today. Our version from the Contemporary English Bible puts it like this: **“You can see the speck in your friend’s eye. But you don’t notice the log in your own eye. How can you say, “My friend, let me take the speck out of**

your eye,” when you don’t see the log in your own eye? First get the log out of your own eye. Then you can see how to take the speck out of your friend’s eye.”

I don’t know that this passage needs much explanation or clarification. Basically, what Jesus is saying is that we have no right to criticize anyone else, unless and until we are free of faults ourselves, which means that we have no right to criticize at all. As someone has said, **“There’s so much bad in the best of us, and so much good in the worst of us that it does not become any of us to find fault with the rest of us.”**

Apparently, this was such a common problem, that Jesus felt compelled to address it. And if we look around us, we can probably agree. It seems to be such a common occurrence, and one of which I am guilty, as probably some of you are, that I began to wonder why. What’s going on that we are so prone to criticize, find fault, cast blame? Why do things like that happen at home, at work, in sports, at school, in life? What’s going on?

I’ve been re-reading a book that a group I am in read a few months ago. It’s about self-deception, and I have to admit that it was uncomfortable reading it the first time, and it’s becoming enlightening to read it this time. One of the things it talks about is how we so often fail to see people as real people, but instead sometimes see them as problems for us, or disappointments to us, and so on.

Let me give you an example from the book by Arbing Institute that points out what I mean. It’s a story that one woman told about her son. She said that she was mad at him, because as a typical teen, he seemed to be making life so very difficult for her. They were in the middle of a standoff of sorts, when he asked to use the car on a Friday night. She really didn’t want him to use it, so she gave him a really early curfew time as a condition—one she didn’t think he’d accept. She told him to be home by 10:30. To her surprise, he said, “OK, Mom,” grabbed the keys off the table, and went out the door.

The mother said that she spent the entire evening feeling very burdened by the whole thing, and vowing to herself never to allow him to use the car again. The more she thought about it, the angrier she got at her irresponsible son! She stewed about it all evening, and then began complaining about the boy to her husband during the 10 o’clock news.

Then she heard the squeal of tires in the driveway, and looked at her watch. It was 10:29. He had made it, and she felt a pang of disappointment, of all things. Her son came bounding in the door, saying, “Made it, Mom!” What do you think she responded? “You sure cut it close,” she said to him.

Now, what was going on in this scenario? If we had asked her before that evening, or even in the course of the evening, what she wanted from her son, her reply would probably have been that she wanted him to be responsible, to keep

his word, and to be trustworthy. But when he *was* acting responsibly, she cut him down.

So, we might ask, did she really want him to be responsible and all those other things? In my view, and hers, apparently not. That's what she said she wanted, but that wasn't what would justify her anger and frustration with the boy. In truth, according to the analysis in the book, she needed him to act irresponsibly and cause problems to justify her negative, critical attitude toward him.

However, what was really happening was that the woman wasn't seeing her son as a real person, with growing pains, problems, and faults, just like everyone else. She was being a bit 'Holier than thou," thinking that she was right in her condemnation of him, and not considering how she might not be fully recognizing the struggles that he, and everyone, go through.

Stories like that one and others that the writer shares really got me to thinking. How many situations do we get into when we magnify the faults of the other person to justify the way we feel about him or her? How often do we set ourselves up as better than another person, and think we need to set them right, or tell them all their faults?

How many times do we attempt to take the speck out of a friend's eye when we have a huge log in our own eye? What is it about ourselves that we are not seeing in an honest, truthful light? When Henry Ford said, "**Don't find fault, find a remedy,**" I wonder if he was thinking about the words of Jesus that we have this morning. I really think that's what Jesus is urging us to do when he said, "**First get the log out of your own eye. Then you can see how to take the speck out of your friend's eye.**"

The way I understand that piece of advice is that we need to realize that we're not perfect, nor is anyone else. Jesus is telling us to take responsibility first for ourselves, and to deal with our own issues, our own tendency to find fault and blame others, our own tendency to criticize and condemn. An unknown writer once said, "**A good cure for the critical spirit is an honest look at ourselves—not at others.**" In other words, let's concentrate on cleaning up our own act, and not concern ourselves with the faults we think we find in others.

That's a good word to remember because it can mark the beginning point of better relationships and a better life. And there's no better time to turn over a new leaf than this very day. This is the time of Lent, the weeks before Easter that are set aside for reflection and introspection, and this honest self-examination might be something all of us could do. It's always a good idea

Let's spend some time reflecting on how we relate to and regard others. Maybe we can begin by thinking about someone with whom we have conflict, or a misunderstanding—someone we're prone to badmouth or criticize. What is it within us that won't allow us to give that

person a break? Why can't we realize that he or she is just a regular person like us?

Maybe we can take our eyes off the faults and mistakes of the other person, and ask ourselves what it is within us that can't become softer and more understanding? Let's ask ourselves why we want others to fail or make mistakes. To make us look better? To justify our bad feelings toward an ex-spouse, a former boss, a co-worker, a friend? Let's pray to begin to see ourselves as the same as the one we're so eager to criticize. Let's try seeing ourselves as *a* person, rather than as *the* person. There's a difference, you know?

I'm firmly convinced that our relationship with God is very interconnected with our relationship with others, and if there's a way in which we are looking at others that needs softening and changing, then maybe that needs to be a topic of reflection, prayer and consideration for us in the weeks ahead.

I, for one, am going to spend some serious time reflecting on my own less than noble tendencies, and ask God to help me be more loving, more patient, more understanding. How about you?

CLOSING:

Helen Welshimer has written a little ditty, for lack of a better word, that maybe offers us some wise counsel as we move on through this Lenten season. It's called, "A Little Walk Around Yourself." I've modified it a little, but it goes in part like this:

There are lots of human failures in the average of us all,
And lots of grave shortcomings in the short ones and the tall;
But when we think of evils folks should lay upon the shelves,
It's time we all went out to take a walk around ourselves.

We need so often in this life this balancing of scales,
This seeing how much in us wins and how much in us fails;
Before we judge another—just to lay him on the shelf—
It would be a splendid plan to take a walk around ourselves.

As we move toward Easter, let's remember to work on removing the log from our own eye before we try to take the tiny speck out of our friend's eye. Maybe it's a good idea to "take a walk around ourselves."

Have a good Sunday, and go in peace. Amen.