**“Is that about me?”**

Luke 6:37-42

April 30, 2017, David M. Griebner, Riverside UMC

This past week I received a letter from the State of Ohio with regard to our taxes. The letter required me to go online and “verify” my identity. We all know that fraud is increasing all the time and you can’t be too careful. Well, let me tell you for a fraction of a second I had a very odd thought in response to this request. I knew I was going to have to answer some questions and for just a moment I wondered if I was going to be able to answer their questions as they expected so that they would agree that I was who I said I was. As it turned out there were only three or four questions, they were all multiple choice and the correct answer was always an old phone number or address I recognized. And so after a few moments the computer agreed – I was me.

This experience got me thinking. What if I received a letter from Jesus and He wanted to ask me a few questions so He could “verify” my identity as one of His disciples? I wonder, what would He ask me about and how would things turn out?

We are spending a couple weeks in Luke 6. Luke 6 is one of those places in the Gospels where Jesus lays out a pretty clear picture about how we should live as His disciples. What’s the best way to treat each other, and so on? We will talk about a section of this teaching in a moment. But what really gets my attention is what Jesus says at the end of the chapter. After everything is said and done, after He has laid out the kind of life He longs for us to live, He asks a powerful question. We didn’t read it today, so here it is. “Why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say? (Luke 6:46) Why do you act like you want to obey Me and then not follow through or just do what you want?

In other words, it is possible that if Jesus did ask us to “verify” our identity as one of His disciples, there just might be some issues.

The passage we have today raises this question with regard to three emotions we all experience: judging, condemning and forgiving. These are precisely the kind of emotions, actions and reactions we experience every single day in our routine interactions with family, friends, co-workers and strangers.

And the truth is we’ve all been treated fairly and unfairly, honestly and dishonestly, truthfully and untruthfully. And we have treated others the same way. We have reacted appropriately and inappropriately. We’ve believed the worst about someone, and we were wrong; and we’ve had the worst believed about us, and it was also wrong. We’ve not been given the benefit of the doubt and we have not given someone else the benefit of the doubt. We’ve belittled or put someone down with a look or tone of voice, and we’ve been belittled or been put down in the same ways. We’ve been judged and misjudged and we’ve judged and misjudged.

I could go on, but I’m sure you get the picture. I remember raising my voice with my daughter Claire when she was in second grade and she didn’t meet my expectations on a spelling test. She wasn’t all that concerned, but I said – loudly as I remember – that it wasn’t good enough to get into college! Really? I’m sure that’s exactly what she was thinking about in second grade.

If we want to see it, the list is endless. So what does Jesus want to teach us about this often destructive slice of our life? Here’s the beauty of His words. They are not just how we go wrong but how we can go right. They contain not just warning, but hope. Jesus deals with this subject in three sections and we will too. I’ve given each section a heading that I believe reflects both the core teaching and the hope each one contains.

**Decide to be gracious** – We start with verses 37 and 38. “Do not judge, *and you will not be judged*. Do not condemn, *and you will not be condemned*. Forgive, *and you will be forgiven.* Notice something about this. Each sentence contains both a negative and a positive, both warning and promise. Do you see the pattern? Don’t do this and you won’t have to endure that. Jesus is trying to help us to move us away from something that is hurtful or harmful and toward something that will be a blessing.

And everything builds to the last sentence. “Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.” Many times I’ve heard this verse yanked out of context and applied to a request for money. Jesus does talk about being generous with our financial resources, but that’s not what He’s talking about here. This is about how we can learn to treat each other generously in our ordinary day-to-day living.

Choose to be generous, He says. Choose to believe the best, He says. Decide to give the benefit of the doubt. When you accept My help to live this way you will see even more clearly that this is the very same grace God offers to you, and the more you see His grace, the more you will be able to offer grace to others. “Generosity begets generosity,” says the Message Bible.

Decide to be generous. Now, again here’s the truth. We can’t do this on our own. Fortunately Jesus doesn’t ask us to. This is the focus of the next few verses.

**Let Me help you to see –** Jesus asks,“Can the blind lead the blind? Will they not both fall into a pit?” For a long time this didn’t make a lot of sense to me, but then it hit me. How often do we base our response to someone or some situation on limited information? We assume we know what is going on, but often we don’t really know; we haven’t taken the time to really see the other person, feel what they are feeling, and so on. We react first and ask questions later. How many times have you gotten into an argument or believed something negative or hurtful about someone, but it turns out your assumptions were all wrong? Often it is like the blind leading the blind. But it doesn’t have to be this way says Jesus.

So He adds this. “The student is not above the teacher, but everyone who is fully trained *will be like their teacher.”* Do you see what He’s saying? He’s saying He will help us to be like Him! We don’t have to be blind. *Jesus was an absolute master of the appropriate response.* He knew what was in the heart. And He can help us to see too, maybe not as deeply as He did, but deeper that we can imagine. He can help us to pause and reflect before we respond or open our mouth. He can show us how to have the difficult conversation. When I think about how Jesus treated people, including those who needed to hear the hard word, I always think of how Isaiah describes the Messiah. “A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out.” (Isaiah 42:3) He can show us how to do this too.

**We are all in the same boat –** The final piece of advice Jesus gives us is this: you are all in the same boat. He asks, “Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, ‘Brother, let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when you yourself fail to see the plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.”

Maybe it’s time for a brief illustration from some low hanging fruit. If you are of a certain personality type then one of the places you wrestle with everything Jesus is talking about here is when you are in the car. This week I was driving down Zollinger road on my way to church. Because of all the parked cars I always stay in the left hand lane. Behind me was a young driver in a BMW. Apparently she was in a hurry and I wasn’t driving fast enough. She was constantly trying to get around me, but there were too many parked cars on the inside lane. Finally she caught a break. She gunned it and slipped around me on the right. But then, just as she pulled around me and got back in the left hand lane to avoid a parked car, a couple blocks ahead a Fed Ex truck pulled out in front of her! She didn’t have to slam on the brakes, but she did have to slow down, again. Yes! Justice! I actually took my hands off the wheel and clapped! So there I was, working on a message about generosity, and not judging, and living like Jesus wanted me to live and I had just done exactly the opposite. And here’s the real kicker. At every moment I knew what I was doing. I was even thinking of Jesus and this message as I was doing it! And I still did it!

“Why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say?”

For the second week in a row I want to leave you with a story. Again, this is one of my stories. I think this story is appropriate not only for the kind of interpersonal experiences we have of judging and condemning, but for where we can find ourselves as a church, a community, a country and a world. I call this story, “Blindsided.”

They had been sitting there facing each other for longer than either of them could remember. It was a staring contest. The first one to blink lost everything. However, the funny thing was that they had been at it for so long they were both completely blind! So they sat there in their chairs, unblinking, and unable to tell whether or not they had won. All each one knew for sure was that he hadn't lost yet.

Suddenly they were both aware that a there was a Third Person in the room. They

both heard him at the same time.

“Hey! You!” they said in unison.

“Yes,” came the reply from the stranger, “what can I do for you?”

Without so much as a moment's hesitation they both said, “Tell me, has he blinked yet?”

“I can’t tell,” said the Third Person, “the lights have been off in this room for quite some time.” He continued, “But I know a place where a light shines that is brighter than the darkness in this room. It is brighter than the darkness between you, and brighter than the darkness in you. I will lead you there if you want me to.”

The two contestants were silent for a long time. Finally, one of them spoke.

“I want to go.”

He stood up and reached out for the hand he knew must surely be there in the darkness, extended toward him. Together he and the Third Person waited a long time for his opponent to make a decision. But after a while, they left.

Sometime later the one left sitting there staring at a now empty chair said, “Good try, but you can’t fool me.”

For all I know he is still there, staring alone into the darkness; and all he knows for sure is that he hasn’t lost – yet.

There is another way. Jesus knows what it is. With His help, in the company of the Holy Spirit we can be generous, He can teach us to see like He sees, and we can remember that we are all in the same boat. We all need the infinite generosity, understanding, and compassion of the Lord every day, and indeed every moment of our lives.

So may we ask Jesus to help us to choose His way through the power of the Spirit. May we gather with our brothers and sisters in worship, Bible Study and prayer so we can strengthen and encourage each other in this way of life. And may we ask Him to lead us into the light so we can be the light He wants us to be.

Let’s pray…