

Matthew 7.1-5
Walk A Mile in My Shoes
WRCOB 9.1.24

There is an old, old story about two neighbors
A baker and a farmer.

The baker bought her butter from the farmer
To use in her bread.

Over time, the baker became suspicious of the farmer.

She weighed the farmer's butter on several occasions
And it did not reach a pound.

So, she had him arrested for fraud.

At the trial, the judge asked the farmer
"I presume you use scales to measure your butter?"



“Yes, of course, your Honor,” the farmer replied.

“And weights?” the judge asked.

“No,” replied the farmer.

“I don’t have a set of weights.”

“Then how do you weigh the butter.”

“Oh, that’s easy,” the farmer said

“When the baker began buying butter from me
I began buying bread from her.”

“I use her one-pound loaves to balance my scales.”

“If the weight of the bread is less than a pound
Than the weight of the butter will be wrong too.”

(Dr. William Mitchell, Building Strong Families)

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Matthew 7:2 NRSV

**. . . and the measure you give will be the measure
you get.**

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Jesus uses wonderful imagery in today’s passage
To highlight humanity’s hypocrisy.



My daughter Darcy drew this sketch
On the back of the bulletin in 2003
As I preached a sermon from the same passage.

It is a quite the caricature
On Jesus' humorous anecdote

In today's passage
Jesus warns us not to judge others
Because it has a boomerang effect.

So many of us criticize others for faults
We fail to in our own lives.

Gossip, petty grievances, imperfections
Trolling, cancer culture, dissing and slamming
Are ways we judge others.

Jesus says, watch it
What goes around, comes around

If we pour poisonous criticisms out
Poisonous criticisms pour back at us.

Life has a way of dishing back what we dish out.

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Often our hypocrisy
Comes from ignorance and a lack of understanding

We don't know what a person has gone through.

Mary T Lathrop in 1895, wrote a poem entitled
"Judge Softly"

In that poem she writes

*Pray, don't find fault with the man that limps,
Or stumbles along the road.
Unless you have worn the moccasins he wears,
Or stumbled beneath the same load.*

It is from this poem that originates the phrase

Before you judge someone, walk a mile in their shoes

We are oh so quick to judge
But not so quick to try and understand
What people are going through

Like the beggar on the corner of Parham and Broad

He seems physically fit.

Wouldn't it be easier to work as a greeter at Walmart?

You don't have to weather the outdoors
And it's a steady income.

Get a job buddy.

There're people with disabilities
Who work a fulltime job
Why can't you?

But do I know what it's like to suffer from PTSD
Or fight a losing battle with alcoholism
Or suffer depression so severe
I can hardly get out of bed?

And like the song with the same title says

Before you abuse, criticize and accuse
Just walk a mile in my shoes,

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A grocery store check-out clerk
Once wrote to columnist Ann Landers.

She complained seeing people buy “luxury” items
—like birthday cakes—
—bags of shrimp—
With their food stamps.

The writer went on to say
That she thought all people on welfare
Were lazy and wasteful
And manipulated the system.

A few weeks later,
Lander’s column was devoted entirely to people
Who responded to the grocery store clerk.

One woman wrote
“I didn’t buy a cake,
But I did buy a bag of shrimp with food stamps.”

“So? My husband had been working at a plant
For fifteen years when it shut down.”

“The shrimp casserole I made was
For our wedding anniversary,
And we had it as leftovers for three days.”

Another woman wrote

“I’m the woman who bought the \$17 birthday cake.
And paid for it with food stamps.”

“I thought the check-out woman
Would burn a hole through me with her eyes.”

“What she didn’t know is the cake was for the birthday
Of my little girl who has cancer.”

The grocery clerk passed judgement
On people she did not know

Throwing the whole lot of them
Into the category of losers and social leeches.

Compassion for others
Comes from an understanding
Of what the person is going through

That understanding may come out
Of a similarly lived experience.

The veteran’s sympathy
For another veteran’s PTSD

An alcoholic’s empathy for the homeless drunk.

If it’s not a lived experience
Our compassion must come
From a learned understanding.

In my involvement with CCAR
Clergy Against Racism
We created Zoom Town Halls

And would break out in small groups
And hear story after painful story
Of how racism affected people.

We walked a mile in their shoes.

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Not only does Jesus chastise us
For looking down on others
From our lofty superior heights

He rebukes us for calling out the small sins of others
While ignoring our own.

Before we find fault in how our neighbors measure up
Let us first find how we measure up.

A 10th Century Monk, Abbot Moses, puts it this way

*They who are conscious of their own sins have no eyes
for the sins of their neighbors.*

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The good news is that it doesn't have to be that way.

Our opening words from the psalmist
Reminds us that we're blessed
Because God has covered our transgressions.

That when we kept silent before God
When we didn't recognize or acknowledge our sins
Our bodies and souls wasted away.

When we became aware of our sins
Confessed and repented
We experienced God's grace in a powerful way.

A little self-reflectio and examination
Not only helps us
To become aware of our weaknesses

It also sensitizes us to problems others face too.

We need to remove the log in our eye first
Before we can focus on the speck in someone else's

It is empathy, Jesus is teaching here.

Empathy inspires rather than condemns
Understands rather than criticizes.

Walk a mile in someone else's shoes
Is an invitation to experience another's life
Particularly one we are apt to criticize.

On a lighter note, Steve Martin says

Before you criticize someone
Walk a mile in their shoes.

That way when you do criticize them
You are a mile away and have their shoes.

Seriously, for followers of Christ
If we are to love our neighbors
We've got to get to know them first

Jesus calls us to humility and self-reflection
Before we judge others.

We need to understand the unique problems
They face that we may never have faced.

I see three ways empathy can happen

1. Get out of your comfort zone

2. See the person not the problem
3. One step at a time.

First, we need to get out of our comfort zones.

That person on the corner

Have you ever talked to him or her?

Asked them how they got there?

Listened to their story?

Have we ever gone into another's neighborhood

Attended an ethnic celebration?

Visited a homeless shelter?

Volunteered at a school?

Visited a prison?

Talk with people not of your kind or social level?

You will see things differently.

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Secondly, see the person, not the problem.

Empathy requires more emphasis on the person

And less focus on the problem

The issues of poverty or racism

Or abuse in its various forms

Are best addressed

When we see a person not a problem

It's easy to judge based on the problem

The woman seeking an abortion

The gay couple seeking equity

The drunk needing a buck

It is easy to write it off as not our problem.

Not so easy, when we know who they are
And what they have been through.

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And thirdly, to walk a mile in someone's shoes
Is not a one-day ordeal

Empathy and understanding don't happen in a day.

Change doesn't happen immediately

It is one small step at a time

You might not see change
But if you involve yourself in the effort
You will be an agent of change.

One step at a time
One conversation at a time
One person at a time

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And so, what are your biases?
Who do you tend to criticize?
Who do you like to judge?

Maybe that's the person you need to get to know?

Is it the veteran down on Hull Street?
Or the ethnic family that brings their kids to Hilltop?

Is it one of our shut-ins that nobody stops to see?

Or the refugee family
Seeking a new home and a new beginning?

Let's go walk a mile in their shoes.

Let's develop a little empathy for them.

Not only will we impact their life
We will impact our own.

Because, if you think about it
Walking a mile in their shoes

Is the same as walking a mile in the shoes of Jesus

Matthew 25:40 NIV

⁴⁰ “The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’