

Title: "Invitation to Admit You Might Be Wrong"

Text: Matthew 7:1-5

Jesus' invitation today is an invitation to take some planks out of our eyes.

- Negatively stated, he's inviting us to stop judging other people.
- Positively stated, he's inviting us to admit we might be wrong sometimes.

I know that's not what any of you want to hear today!

-I mean, how could any of us ever be wrong, right?!

- Not possible.
- We're always right!
- At least I am, just ask my wife.

And the thing is: we like to be right.

- We like to be right about the way we remember events:
  - Our version of the story is obviously the true version.
- We like to be right about the way to make spaghetti sauce.
- We like to be right about the best way to drive to work.
- We like to be right about politics and issues.
- We like to be right about religion and morality.
- We like to be right about everything.

And that generally means that somebody else is just wrong.

- Their version of the story is way off base.
- Their way to make spaghetti sauce is not the way you do it.
- Their political views are just wrong.
- Their religious beliefs are downright heretical.
- Their lifestyle, the choices they make, ....
  - It's all just wrong!

Why can't other people just think and act the way I do?

- The world would be a much better place if everyone would just agree with me.

But then along comes Jesus, and he says, "Oh really?"

- And then he looks me right in the eye and says, "Paul, stop judging everybody."
  - The world would not be a much better place if everyone would just agree with you and think the way you do.

-No. The world would be a much better place,” says Jesus,  
“if you, Paul, would begin to think and act like me.”

-Oh. Yeah.

“The world would also be a much better place

-if you would leave the judging to me,” says Jesus.

“Because you, Paul, do not have the overall view of things  
that I have.

-Your perspective on life is limited.

-Your perspective on people and their stories is limited.

-Your perspective on what is true is limited.

-Your perspective on what is good for you and good for  
others and good for the world is limited.

-And sometimes, Paul, you are just wrong.

-Sometimes, Paul, your perspective is limited by that  
plank in your eye.

-And you’re judging other people, but your ability to judge  
the size of the speck in their eye is hampered  
by that big old plank that is in your eye.

-So why don’t you let me remove the plank in your eye,  
and then we’ll worry about the specks in other people’s  
eyes later.”

Jesus’ invitation today is an invitation to take another kind of  
“yoke” off our backs.

-The “yoke” of *needing to be right* all the time.

-It’s a burden that is tiresome to keep carrying around.

But you know, it’s a yoke that we have been carrying around  
so long that we don’t even think about it anymore.

-We have carried it since our earliest childhood.

-We ourselves learned that we would be judged by

-how well we behaved, how good we looked,

-how smart we were in school, how many right answers  
we knew,

-how good we were at sports, or science, or music, or  
art, or reading or writing or arithmetic.

-And we learned to judge each other by the same standards.

And at home we learned there were right ways to do things  
and wrong ways to do things.

-And in some of our families there were harsh judgments  
meted out for doing the wrong thing,  
-or doing the right thing, but the wrong way.

Others of us grew up experiencing prejudice, where people  
pre-judged us as somehow “faulty,  
-because we were “just a girl,”  
-or because we had a certain skin color,  
-or because we looked different, or talked different, or came  
from someplace else.

We have all experienced the judgments of others our whole  
lives.  
-And we have all learned to be the judges of other people our  
whole lives.

This weight of critiquing and criticizing and judging everyone  
under the sun is a burden we all carry around with us.  
-And part of our need to be right all the time is that we want to  
stop being judged by others ourselves.  
-We want to be found ‘in the right.’  
-We want to be approved of.  
-We want acceptable. We want to pass the test.

And ultimately we want God to say, “Well done, my good and  
faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your Master.”

But here’s the crazy thing about the Kingdom of God:  
-The best way to ensure that the King will welcome you into  
His Kingdom with those words, is by saying sentences like  
these:  
-I’m sorry.  
-I was wrong.  
-I need help.  
-I don’t know everything. <sup>1</sup>

Those are four simple sentences that open up the doors to the  
Kingdom of God.  
-And they are not about proving how right you are.  
-They’re about admitting that you have a plank in your eye.

-They're about letting go of our judgment of others, and about asking God for mercy, and for help.

Do you remember Jesus' story of the Pharisee and the tax collector at the Temple.

-Both men went up to the Temple to pray.

-But the Pharisee stood right up front and prayed about himself: "God, I thank you that I am not like other men, robbers, evildoers, adulterers – or even like that tax collector over there. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get to you, Lord."

-You see, he's patting himself on the back for being so right in his life, and looking down his nose at all those who are so wrong in their lives.

But the tax collector stood at a distance from the altar, and wouldn't even look up to heaven because of his shame.

-And he beat his breast and said quite simply, "God have mercy on me a sinner."

Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, it was the tax collector who went home justified before God that day, not the Pharisee.

The tax-collector knew he had a hundred planks in his eyes, and he begged God for mercy from a repentant heart.

"I'm sorry. I was wrong. I need help. I don't know," he cried.

Jesus said the door to the Kingdom opened right up for him that day.

-But not so much for the Pharisee who was trying so hard to be right about everything.

Or do you remember the story in Luke 7 about Jesus being invited to the home of Simon the Pharisee for dinner.

-And during the dinner as they are reclining at the meal, a woman comes in who is well known as a sinful soul in that town.

-But she begins weeping as she approaches Jesus,  
-and she bows down before him, and her tears are dripping all over his feet,  
-so she starts wiping the tears off his feet with her hair.

And Simon the Pharisee, and all the other dinner guests are aghast.

They can't believe this is happening at their little dinner party,  
-and they can't believe Jesus isn't doing anything.  
-He is not recoiling from this sinful woman.  
-He is not leaping to his feet and saying, "Eeww, get away from me."

He is simply welcoming this woman, and treating her attentions with respect and compassion.  
-And they think, "If this Jesus were a real prophet, he'd know what kind of woman this was, that she's a sinner!"

You see, they think they know what is true about this woman.  
-And they think they know what is true about Jesus.  
-And they think they know what the right thing to do in this situation would be.

But Jesus says, "How about if we try and take the planks out of all your eyes, so you can see a little more clearly."  
-Simon, when I came to be a guest at your dinner tonight,  
-you didn't greet me at the door with a kiss of friendship.  
-you didn't wash my feet at the door as one should for an arriving guest.  
-you didn't anoint my head with oil as one would for an honored guest.  
-You didn't honor me in any of those ways as a guest at your meal.

But this woman has not stopped kissing my feet,  
-and has washed them with her tears and dried them with her hair,  
-and has poured her best perfume on them to honor and anoint me.

I tell you the truth, Simon, her many sins are forgiven – for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little, loves little."

You see, the plank in Simon's eye was this plank of "rightness."

- He and his guests thought they were right and righteous.
- So they were condescending to Jesus and condemning of this woman.

And they thought they were justified in their attitudes toward both.

- In fact, they knew they were.
- He was not a real Rabbi or a real prophet, and so they didn't need to treat him like one.
- And she was obviously a red-letter sinner, and the only thing they needed to do with her was remove her from the premises.

But Jesus shows himself to be a true prophet, and a real Rabbi.

- He uncovers their sin and points them towards the way of salvation and forgiveness,
- even as He leads this woman, who already knows her sins full well, towards salvation and forgiveness, too.

All it would take for Simon and the other guests is to say, "I'm sorry. I was wrong. I didn't know. I need help."

To them, and to all of us, Jesus says:  
"Stop judging, or you, too, will be judged."

It's an invitation to admit we might be wrong sometimes.  
It's an invitation to take off the yoke of "rightness" that we have learned to bear from the youngest ages.  
It's an invitation to admit that we have planks in our eyes.

The good news is that Jesus' ministry is all about removing planks from eyes.

- In fact, if you go back through any or all of the 4 gospels with that image in mind,
- you will see Jesus removing planks from people's eyes everywhere he goes.

Not literally, but figuratively.

- He is always and everywhere trying to get people to see what they are hindered from seeing.
- He does it every day with his own disciples.
- They are often just as blind and prejudice as everyone else.

- He does it with Pharisees and Sadducees.
- He does it with the Samaritan woman at the well.
- He does it with the priests and Sanhedrin in Jerusalem.
- He does it with John the Baptist when he starts to doubt and not see clearly what is going on.

Jesus is always and everywhere seeking to remove planks from people's eyes so they will be able to see the truth:  
-about God, and about themselves, and about others.

And you know what, those who kept on following Jesus and showed themselves truly his disciples,  
-were simply those who were teachable.  
-They were those who were willing to admit they might have a plank in their eye that needed to be removed.

They were those who never stopped saying:  
-I'm sorry.  
-I was wrong.  
-I need help.  
-I don't know everything.

Jesus is always glad to remove the planks from the eyes of those who ask.  
-May we ask more and more.  
-And may the leaders of our country ask.  
-And may the people of this world ask.  
-Admitting we might just be wrong sometimes could change the world.

Let us pray.

<sup>1</sup>These four sentences are taken from Louise Penny's novels. Her wise Chief Inspector Armand Gamache uses them as he mentors new young detectives for his murder investigation team.