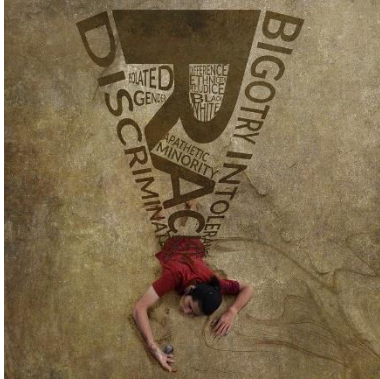


Judgment Under the Judgment Seat of Christ

Sermon for the 3rd Sunday in Advent

Sermon Text: 1 Corinthians 4:1-5



This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. ²Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful. ³But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. ⁴For I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me. ⁵Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God.

Sarah was a normal and happy girl, like any other child. In school, she had average grades and she was exceptionally gifted in sports. She was open and honest and had many friends. To her parents, it looked as if their child would have a promising future. That all changed overnight. Someone in her class hacked Sarah's email account and had spread terrible messages using her name. All at once, Sarah became the most unpopular girl in the entire school. She lost all her friends. She was alone in the world and ashamed to talk about it with her parents. At some point, she herself couldn't tell the difference between what was true and what was not. Her grades got worse. She did only what was necessary and often remained in bed the whole day. Her young life already seemed to have been destroyed in its prime. And the question is why? How can children be so mean? In his book, "Games People Play", the psychologist Eric Berne analyzes human behavior and comes to the conclusion that people enjoy judging others. It is easy to see this when an entire group comes together and fights against another group or an individual. The Bible actually knew about this phenomenon long before Eric Berne. Look at how God shows us the beginning of human history. Both Adam and Eve had sinned. And what did they do? Adam blamed his wife, Eve, and even had the audacity to claim that God Himself was at fault because He had given Eve to Adam. And Eve quickly put the blame on the snake. And the story continues. Cain looked jealously at his brother Abel and killed him. The story of humanity continues just like this. Unfortunately, this characteristic is also seen among Christians. At that time in the Corinthian congregation, the people had split into smaller groupings. A spiritual superstar was chosen and these people were measured by him and others condemned. Some were followers of Peter, others followers of Apollos, and still others were followers of Paul. These groups fought with and against each other. Human qualities were compared and placed at the center of church. And that meant the spiritual death of the Christian community. Yes, when you raise your hand and point your fingers at others, that is the death of Christian community because Christ is then pushed far away and you no longer see your own shortcomings - just the mistakes of others. Christ shows us how dangerous that is with the parable of the tax collector and the pharisee. The pharisee was technically a good man. He had done a lot of good things. He had given money to the poor, fasted, and prayed constantly. All good things, but the moment he looked at his brother, the tax collector, and judged him, all his spiritual accomplishments were null and void. Because the criticizing finger doing the pointing, pointed back at himself. Dear congregation, if it is so much a part of our human nature that we judge other people and if this characteristic is so

dangerous, then we should listen attentively today. Because this danger most likely already exists among us. We are people too and we are not immune to the danger of judging and we are also not immune to creating prejudice towards others. We can try a little experiment: think to yourself - what do you think about the following people: black people, German women, Arabic men. And what do you think about Afghans or about Iranians. What movies come to mind when you think about these groups of people? In his analysis, the psychologist Eric Berne explains that people are actually deeply insecure. With that also comes a very deep desire to be loved. In summary, he says that our prejudices are due to the fact that we feel insecure and unloved. And so, we incorrectly think that we must think and believe what the majority believes to be loved by them. We mistakenly think that we are finally loved when we believe what the majority believes – which is a huge mistake! When we have blind trust in the majority, we have pushed God from His throne. We made human opinion our false god. This human behavior drives us away from the One that can and wants to truly love us. Our behavior drives us away from Christ. Besides, the prejudices are not true! They are just as wrong as the false emails that were written from Sarah's email account. Paul gives the Corinthians, and us, completely different advice. First, he makes himself completely free from the judgments of others: ³ *But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court.* But it's not as if Paul tells them to leave him alone, the important thing is that he's free and clear. No, it's the opposite because he continually says: *"I don't judge myself either...It's the Lord who judges me."* Paul knows like no other that our own conscience is also not a safe harbor on which we can rely. Paul himself lived a long chapter of his life during which he thought that he was right with God. And yet the reason was wrong. This danger is within us all. The conscience can also be tremendously wrong and mislead us. But God doesn't leave us standing alone. He didn't leave Adam and Eve alone in their self-righteous delusions. And everyone after them, He doesn't leave them alone either. God reveals Himself to us. And when He does that, falsehood and hypocrisy must give way. According to Psalm 91, His truth is a shield and buckler. And in Psalm 51, David proclaims: "You desire truth in the inward being." Paul speaks from his own experience when he commends us to God's judgment seat. Paul experienced in his own life how the scales fell away from his eyes. He was able to meet the living Christ. This encounter was a hard judgment of everything upon which he had built his life. And yet, Paul wanted nothing other than to be close to this Christ. And so he encourages the congregation and us: Let go of falsehoods. Quit justifying yourselves. Stop bullying or even judging one another. When you do that, you distance yourselves from Christ. Repent instead. Come again into the middle where the Lord Jesus is. There is no other point that makes this more clear than when we come to the Lord's Supper. When we come to Holy Communion, we all become one. All the judgments and prejudices fall away. And only Christ remains. Christ within me and Christ within others. And at the same time, we lift up our eyes and look to the coming Christ. We really want to stand under His judgment seat. No other court has the same authority other than the court of this Christ. And at the same time, no other judgment can touch me other than the judgment from this Christ. And that is, "you were born in sin and you lived in sin but through My blood you are righteous and good." Amen.