

Sermon :: 13-Sept-2026
Proper 19, Year A

“Who are *you* to pass judgment ... ?”

Jim and I first met in Provincetown, Massachusetts, at the very, very tip of Cape Cod. (As an East Coast-er, I'll confess, I was always just a bit discombobulated there: Due to the way the end of the cape curls around on itself, the sun *sets* over the *ocean*. For my whole life, the sun had always *risen* over the ocean and *set* over land! How could there be any other *way*?) Jim had been going there for years, and so, we made many a trip to Provincetown together, and I have scores of wonderful memories. But the most prominent one ... the one that's left the biggest impression on me, to this day ... was, of all things, a bumper sticker I saw pasted on the back of one of those faux 'trolleys' that ferried people up and down the main commercial street¹ in town: It read, in full, “That *judging* thing? I've *got* that. [Signed,] God.”

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Now, far be it from me to reduce such a venerable authority ... such an august theologian ... as St Paul to a bumper sticker (!) ... but that's really the gist of his message today, isn't it: Let *God* do the judging. Just as in our *own* times ... the issues Paul's counseling the earliest Christians in *Rome* about are relatively *trivial* in the *abstract* but, no doubt, seemingly of *great import* in the *moment*: to fast or not to fast; the right day to worship God; whether to celebrate a certain festival. These things, says Paul, aren't excuses to *judge—condemn—exclude—*others, for Jesus died for us *all* ... and it is for *Him* that we live. If *anyone* is going to do any judging ... it'll be *God*.

And the parable Jesus tells today only *amplifies* Paul's message: A king—representing *God*—is outraged when a slave—representing *us*—whose a truly *massive* debt² the king has just forgiven ... thus offering *liberty* and *peace* in lieu of *judgment* and *condemnation* ... turns right around and *judges* another slave: demanding payment of a trifling amount³ ... and then condemning the poor man to a debtors' prison when he can't pay. The king will have *none* of it: I chose *not* to judge *you*, *didn't* I? Chose to *forgive* you ... to *overlook* your mismanagement of your affairs ... to see you in the *best possible light*, didn't I? Well, if you won't treat others with even a *modicum* of the great mercy that *I* showed *you*, the king decrees, then *heaven* help you!

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Today, we formally kick off our stewardship campaign for 2027: the season when we ask everyone to prayerfully *consider, discern* and then *commit* to the amount of money that they'll dedicate to All Souls', next year, to support the mission and ministries of this parish. And, this year, recognizing *both* the abundance of *resources* we've *already* been blessed with ... *and* the abundance of *opportunities* that *lie ahead* of us ... we've chosen as our theme *ROOM TO GROW*. For when we share—

¹ Named, of all things, Commercial Street!

² The value of a single talent was equivalent to the wages a laborer would earn over 15 – 20 *years*, and this slave owes the king 10,000 talents! The improbability—indeed, ridiculousness—of the story's premise is the very nature of Jesus' parabolic teachings: He consistently greatly exaggerates everyday realities in order to better demonstrate the heavenly providence of God's grace.

³ At least by comparison to the first slave's debt to the king: The second slave owes only the equivalent of about 100 *days'* labor.

pool—concentrate—what we already *have, individually* ... and devote it to *Jesus'* work in this world, *collectively* ... we increase the 'GROWTH-potential' of our resources *exponentially*.

In the coming weeks, you'll be hearing about how our collective pledges will help us GROW as a parish: GROW *numerically*, especially as we contemplate calling, next year, an associate rector for children, youth and small-group ministry; GROW *spiritually*, as we begin offering more opportunities to learn about, try on and share with one another new pathways for deepening our faith and experiencing the Divine; and GROW in *witness*, as we envision new ways to open our doors ... and our arms ... to the neighbors all around us.

Today, we focus on our potential for growing in *service*: in serving the left-out and the left-behind ... the *sidelined* and the *redlined* ... the *overlooked* and the *overlorded*. As long as there's *been* a Church, it's been the *role* of the Church—and sometimes, the Church *alone*—to *regard* ... to *care* for ... to *lift* up ... to *build* up ... to *respect*, in *humanity*, and *affirm*, in *dignity* ... *without judgment* ... those whom society has no time for ... is bothered or bewildered by ... wishes would disappear—or, sometimes, tries to *make* disappear. As *individuals*, we do not always agree among ourselves—philosophically, politically, perhaps even morally—about *whom* we should serve and what *service* we should provide ... and that's OK: God gave us all the ability to reason, which means that, *individually*, we often come to a *variety* of conclusions.

But *collectively* ... as the *Church*; as the body of *Christ* ... when we serve others ... we *live* ... we *demonstrate* ... we *proclaim* to the world, in the loudest possible way ... the *non-judging*, *unconditional* love of the King who forgave *us*, entirely and undeservedly, a debt we'd *never* have been able to repay. When, *together*, we serve others, without judgment ... we 'pay forward' Jesus' mercy in *exactly* the way the king in the parable wanted the forgiven slave to share the bounty of the grace *he'd* received.

And just *think* about how *many* ways All Souls' has ROOM TO GROW in choosing *not* to *judge* ... but, instead, *simply* to *serve* ... exactly as Jesus teaches us:

- Our Showers of Blessings ministry: the non-judgment of one hand holding out a clean towel and the other showing the way to a clean, private shower stall ... so one of our unhoused sisters can enjoy the simple dignity of *being*—and *feeling*—clean. How much ROOM there is to GROW *this* service, in Jesus' un-judging love!
- Our mission partnership with St Mark's, City Heights: the non-judgment of a sack of groceries ... a bag of fresh produce ... a backpack stuffed with a schoolchild's hopes for the new year ... a festive, convivial luncheon on Christmas Eve, when the rest of the world is too cozy to care. How much ROOM there is to GROW *this* service, in Jesus' un-judging love!
- Our generous support of Loaves and Fishes in Ocean Beach: the non-judgment of providing food not only for those who have homes to cook it in, but also those who *don't* ... of providing pet food for pets so all the *human* food can feed *humans* ... the relief of a hygiene kit to address most intimate needs ... the pleasure of a new pair of socks or underwear to replace what was lost ... or stolen ... or just worn out. How much ROOM there is to GROW *this* service, in Jesus' un-judging love!
- Our long-time support of Peninsula Community Senior Center: the non-judgment of transportation to important appointments, no questions asked ... of mornings spent with

friends, in conversation and activity, when days are otherwise so long and empty ... of porch visits, to check in; of computer help, to stay connected; of lunches, to learn and explore ... and, above all, of allowing our seniors to maintain not only the ability, but also the self-esteem, of living independently as long as they can. How much ROOM there is to GROW *this* service, in Jesus' un-judging love!

- And in so many other ways: the non-judgment of ¶*Agapé Campus Ministry*, spreading the Good News of Christ to students at UCSD and SDSU ... of ¶*Colegio de Esperanza*, helping schoolchildren in Tijuana ... of ¶*Episcopal Community Services*, assisting our neighbors at the margins find their rightful places in the center of society ... ¶*St Paul's Senior Services*, providing housing security and affordable healthcare to seniors across our community ... and as you saw in this week's eNews, ¶a new invitation for All Souls' to begin providing a *second* meal, each month, for the women and children staying at *Rachel's Night Shelter*. How much ROOM there is to GROW in *all* these services, in Jesus' un-judging love!

And *today*, in fact, we have a tangible way for *all* of us to engage in the non-judging service-of-all Jesus calls us to: Devon Schmitt, an online parishioner of All Souls'—*thank you, Devon!*—has prepared *hundreds* of give-away bags for our unhoused brothers and sisters: water, snacks, toiletry items, socks and the like. You can pick them up at the picnic. *Please* take one ... or five ... or ten ... and give them—*no* judgment, *all* love—to people you see standing on the traffic islands, huddled on the sidewalks and curled up on park benches, this week. How much ROOM we *all* have to GROW in service, in Jesus' un-judging love!

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When the Church serves those whom the rest of the world would rather not acknowledge or encounter ... would prefer were invisible or, at least, somewhere—*anywhere—else* ... we embody both the *noblest* and the most *charitable* principles of Jesus' non-judgment: giving *ourselves* over to those who, due to the circumstances of their lives, have little, if any, means of caring for *themselves*, in the moment. The *world* may *judge* them—and sometimes, loudly—as *losers* ... but *we regard—esteem*—them as the fellow beloved of Christ, Who gave *Himself* for *all* of us.

There is *so, so* much ROOM TO GROW our vital service of non-judgment ... and *collectively*, our *individual* pledges will help fund this GROWTH. Therefore, I ask you: Will you please prayerfully consider and commit to GROWing it *with* us?

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