



# One Page Sermon

## By Pastor Robb McCoy

### February 5, 2023

Worship Every Sunday at 9:30 AM

## Sermon on the Mount: Judge not

Sermon from February 5, 2023

Scripture: Matthew 7:1-14, 24-29

*The Simpsons* is one of my all-time favorite television shows. While I haven't watched it regularly for many years, one of my favorite things about the show was how it treated God, religion, and Scripture. Twice in the history of the show, today's passage was directly quoted. Both times it was quoted by Lisa Simpson, the show's resident agnostic. Both times she used it in the midst of a religious fervor that was singling out someone for their "sinfulness." Both times it was dismissed by the religious leaders as an insignificant part of Jesus' message.

In one episode, her brother Bart is being condemned by the church for stealing from the offering plate. The congregation believes (erroneously) that they caught him red-handed in this theft. Rev. Lovejoy is in the midst of condemning Bart when Lisa defends her brother and says, "Doesn't the Bible teach, 'judge not, lest ye be judged.'" Rev. Lovejoy's response is, "It might be somewhere near the back," as if "near the back" renders it unimportant.

In another episode, this one a period piece set in the midst of the Salem witch trials, Marge is accused of being a witch. An angry mob of puritans chased her to the edge of a cliff, where she will undergo a trial. If she falls to her death, she will be innocent of being a witch, and will receive her reward in heaven. If she is guilty of being a witch, then she will be able to fly herself to safety. As the mob approaches Lisa shouts, "Stop! Doesn't the Bible teach 'judge not lest ye be judged!'" This time it is the leader of the mob who responds, "The Bible says a lot of things, shove her!" And Marge is shoved off the cliff.

These two brilliant scenes reveal to us a truth about Christianity that we may not feel comfortable with. It is Lisa, the atheist, who holds up a mirror to the religious. When confronted, they dismiss this admonition as irrelevant or unimportant. Jesus teaches us some hard things to accept, and it is very easy to dismiss those things, especially when we get our outrage going.

This command to not judge is essential. It is a crucial part of this Sermon on the Mount, even if it is "somewhere near the back." When Jesus warns us to not judge, he does not mean, "don't use good judgement." Instead, Matthew scholar Warren Carter suggests that

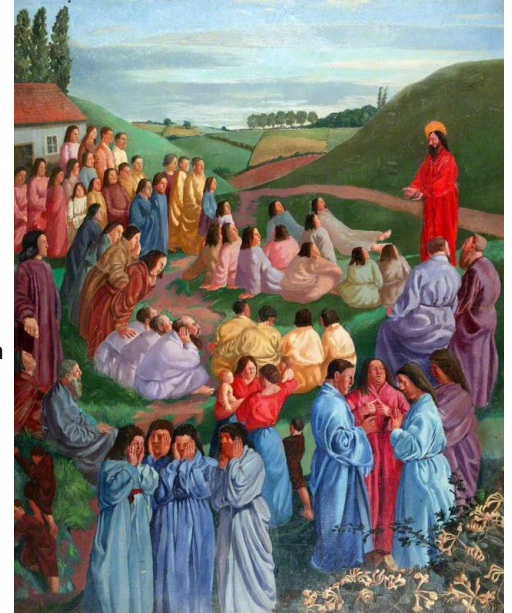
we should think of this as "condemn." As in, "Do not condemn others or you will be condemned."

When we condemn others, we end the conversation. We end the relationship. When someone is condemned, they are no longer worthy of our time. Someone who is condemned is dismissed. It is much more difficult however, to sit with them and work on understanding.

Perhaps this is the narrow road he describes. The wide road is outrage, condemnation of others, and ending relationships and conversation. The narrow road is more difficult. The narrow road includes the act of looking at our own sin, our own misjudgment, and our own shortcomings. When we do the hard work of looking inward, when we do the self-work, we may find that along with the specks in others' eyes, we may find some empathy. We may find some compassion. We may find the source of those specks. We may even find some common ground.

There is a lot of condemnation in our world. People condemn others for their ignorance, their mistakes, their insensitivity. There are a lot of cruel people in the world that deserve to be called out. There is a lot of bad theology – built on shifting sand. There are a lot of harmful words, practices, and injustices in the world that are done in the name of the gospel. There are a lot of angry, hateful mobs who want to condemn "the witches" in our midst.

It is easy to condemn and see the speck in the eye of another. Condemnation ends the possibility of reconciliation. This does not mean we allow others to do harm, dehumanize, or act without accountability. Hopefully however, we can walk the narrow road of introspection, empathy, and willingness to work toward reconciliation.



*Sermon on the Mount*, photo credit: Manchester Art Gallery, artuk.org