

March 21, 2012

Questions for Lent and Easter  
The Judging Question  
John 7:14-25

**Opening Words:** John Simone Sr. once said, "*The key to wisdom is knowing all the right questions.*" I think he is correct. Even without answers, questions have value. After all, what is a question? A question is nothing more than a request for more information. Only fools think they know everything. How many questions have you asked lately? Jesus asked twenty questions in the Gospel of John. Those questions are the foundation of my newest sermon series, *Questions for Lent and Easter*. We are going to look at twelve different questions the Master asked. Each one is an excellent question because each one is timeless.

This is question number nine. I have called the message *The Judging Question*. According to old Jewish law there were three great festivals in the Jewish calendar. There was Passover. It was a time to remember how God led them out of Egypt. There was Pentecost. It was their Thanksgiving. A time to celebrate the harvest. The third festival was the Feast of the Tabernacles. It commemorated God's goodness to the people during their forty years in the wilderness. (Lev. 23:33-43) The name came from the leafy shelters the people lived in during the festival. It is this festival that Jesus is observing in the text for this evening. May God give you ears to hear this evening's scripture lesson, John 7:14-25.

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**John 7:14-24** 14 Not until halfway through the festival did Jesus go up to the temple courts and begin to teach. 15 The Jews there were amazed and asked, "How did this man get such learning without having been taught?" 16 Jesus answered, "My teaching is not my own. It comes from the one who sent me. 17 Anyone who chooses to do the will of God will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own. 18 Whoever speaks on their own does so to gain personal glory, but he who seeks the glory of the one who sent him is a man of truth; there is nothing false about him. 19 Has not Moses given you the law? Yet not one of you keeps the law. Why are you trying to kill me?" 20 "You are demon-possessed," the crowd answered. "Who is trying to kill you?" 21 Jesus said to them, "I did one miracle, and you are all amazed. 22 Yet, because Moses gave you circumcision (though actually it did not come from Moses, but from the patriarchs), you circumcise a boy on the Sabbath. 23 Now if a boy can be circumcised on the Sabbath so that the law of Moses may not be broken, why are you angry with me for healing a man's whole body on the Sabbath? 24 Stop judging by mere appearances, but instead judge correctly."

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There was once a wise old man sitting at the gate of an ancient city. A young traveler stopped before entering the city and asked the old man, "What kind of people live in this town?" The wise man answered with a question, "What kind of people were in your former town?" "Oh, they were liars and cheats and thugs and drunks, terrible people;" the young traveler replied. The old man shook his head, "The people in this town are the same way. " Later another stranger paused to ask the same question, "What kind of people live in this town? " Again, the wise man answers the question with the same question, "What kind of people were in your former town?" The second traveler answered, "Oh, I left a fine town. The people were good and kind and honest and hardworking." The wise man smiled and said, "The people in this town are the same way." There is only one point to that ancient story.

Our attitudes towards others effect the way we look at life and the way we are treated my others. People who are kind and forgiving toward others, usually experience tolerance. People who are harsh and critical toward others, usually experience harsh treatment. Let me ask you this question: What kind of people live in your town? If that question makes you think say, **"Amen!"**

Let us look at this evening's text together. According to verse 14, the Festival of the Tabernacle is about half over. Jesus goes to the temple and begins to teach. There is nothing orderly about his lecture. He changes topic three times in ten verses. First, he talks about his authority. It came from God. Second, he talks about his enemies. They are trying to kill him. Third, he talks judging others. The orthodox leaders of the faith have been judging Jesus because he healed the man on at the pool on the Sabbath. (John 5) Through the legalistic eyes of his enemies Jesus had sinned. To them, the law was more important then the people. To Jesus, people were more important then the law. What is more important to you?

This evening, I want to look verse 24, *"Stop judging by mere appearances, and make the right judgment."* I am going to surround that verse by asking you three questions. The first question is: when is the last time you judge? This is the second question: what is right judgment? This is the third and final question: what do your judgments say about you? My goal is to helping you have a clearing understanding of judging so you can have a clearer understanding of God's will for your life. So if you are ready to begin say, **"Amen!"**

History tells us Winston Churchill was forced to make a painful choice during World War II. The British secret service had broken the Nazi code and informed Churchill that the Germans were going to bomb Coventry. He had two alternatives: (1) evacuate the citizens and save hundreds of lives at the expense of indicating to the Germans that the code was broken; or (2) take no action, which would kill hundreds but keep the information flowing and possibly save

many more lives. Churchill had to choose and followed the second course. That story illustrates for us that life is filled with choices. With every choice you are forced to make a judgment.

### **When was the last time you judged?**

This is question number one. When was the last time you judged? I think it is important to be honest. We judge things all the time. Webster defines judgment as an opinion formed after consideration. Wrapped in that consideration is judgment. If you have made any right choices in life then you have made some right judgments. It is impossible to live in this world and not judge. Some of the judgments we make have few consequences. What you choose to eat for supper is based on a judgment. How much you ate for supper is based on a judgment. Some of the judgments you make have long term consequences. Are you going to go to college or enter the force? Who are you going to marry? How soon do you want to retire? We judge things all the time because we are forced to make decisions! If you can agree with that say, **"Amen!"**

One of the saddest stories I have heard in the news lately is about Trayvon Martin. I bet you know his story. It has dominated the news. He was a seventeen year old black teenager, who lived in Sanford, Florida. According to most people he was doing nothing wrong. However, a neighborhood watch volunteer, a man by the name of George Zimmerman, thought he looked suspicious. Zimmerman was not a law enforcement officer. He was a volunteer. He reported this suspicious character and decided to follow him. Volunteer Zimmerman followed Martin and was carrying a gun. He confronted the Martin and you know what happened. Martin was killed but Zimmerman is still free. Some say Trayvon Martin was guilty of being nothing but being young and black. I don't think we have heard the end of this story.

### **What is right judgment?**

This is question number two. What is right judgment? That question is based on verse 24, *"Stop judging by mere appearances, but instead judge correctly."* What does that verse mean? It means the choices we make must reflect the values of Christ. In a couple of weeks we will remember the arrest, trials and death of Jesus. Jesus died as a common criminal but what was his crime? He was guilty of nothing but loving everyone. You are a disciple of Jesus Christ! You are supposed to be a little more like Jesus everyday. Did Zimmerman's judgment reflect the value of Christ? Do your judgments reflect the values of Christ? If that makes you think say, **"Amen!"**

It was just about this time last Wednesday evening. I bet you remember. The lights were off and the candles were lit. I was just about ready to begin when we noticed a young man standing by the door. I didn't pay attention to him at first because I miss identified him. I thought he was an inactive church member.

When we began talking to him we heard the truth. He and his family were looking for a new church. I felt sorry for him. He only wanted to talk to an individual. Instead, he was addressing a small crowd. Do you remember what I did? I gave him one of my business cards. A couple of days later he called me. His name is Eric. He told me why he was changing church and told me he was going to come last week. He didn't come last week so I hope to see him on Sunday. It was one of those strange things that happen in the life of the church. However, what was the most interesting part of that encounter with Eric was people's reaction to him.

I got three different reactions from people this week. The first group believed Eric. I think they are the ones that are most like Jesus. They believed him. He was just a young man with a family who was looking for a church home. It is just that simple. We are a church. He saw cars in the parking lot so he stopped to get some basic information. The second group was a little more critical. They were suspicious of him. Some people thought he was looking for help. Occasionally, some people stop by who are in financial crisis and ask for help. Most of the time we are able to help them because of the money generated by The Help Hand. I will be honest with you. I thought Eric was looking for help. The third group thought he was here to do harm. You can't be too critical of that group. The twenty-four hours news stations are filled with ugly stories. A stranger walks in and opens fire on innocent victims. Several people thought Eric was going to pull out a gun and start shooting. I suppose that is an option. We live in scary times. What did you think about Eric? Did you believe Eric? Where you suspicious of Eric? Where you afraid of Eric?

### **What do your judgments say about yourself?**

This is question number three. What do your judgments say about yourself? Our reaction to Eric says more about us than we are to admit. When we judge other people be careful. It must be a right judgment. You are a disciple of Jesus Christ! Do the judgments reflect the values of Christ? Let me end with the words of Mother Teresa. She once said, *"If you judge people you will have no time left to love them."* And all of God's people said, **"Amen!"**