**Who Are You to Judge Your Neighbor?**

**The Word**

Read James 4:11-12, 5:19-20 and Matthew 7:1-5

**The Big Idea**

As brothers and sisters who have all experienced the forgiveness of God in Christ, we are called out of judgmental attitudes towards one another into postures of loving care for each other.

**Questions for Discussion**

1. On Sunday, some examples were given of judgmental attitudes and comments. Where do you most see a judgmental view towards other believers popping up in the church? In yourself?

2. On Sunday we talked about the idea that we are the body of Christ, deeply connected to one another as one body. To what extent should we take on responsibility for other believers struggles and imperfections?

3. Read through the “resolutions” at the end of the sermon outline. What about those stands out most to you, and why?

4. The book of James ends with the phrase “and covers a multitude of sins” also quoted in1 Peter 4:7: “love covers a multitude of sins.” What do you think that phrase means practically? What doesn’t it mean?

**Neighborhood Question of the Week**

Who in your neighborhood do you avoid because they make you uncomfortable for some reason? What would it look like to connect with them this week even in simple ways?

**Sermon Outline**

I. Introduction

A. James wants to impress on us that we are a family in Christ

1. Notice the word “brothers” (3x in v. 11) and “neighbor” (v. 12)

2. “Koinonia” is a Greek word that captures our shared life together in Christ

Shared forgiveness, shared adoption into God’s family, shared reception of the Holy Spirit, shared hope of eternal life, etc.

3. “Christian brotherhood is not an ideal we must realize; it is rather a reality created by God in Christ in which we may participate.” – Dietrich Bonhoeffer

B. James is addressing the sad reality that we forget this

1. We view ourselves not as part of the body but rather as individuals, and we view each other as rivals/obstacles to our own desires

2. Ch. 4 is all about fights and quarrels in the body of Christ (see 4:1)

II. Our passage

A. The problem: speaking against and judging other believers (v. 11)

1. This can involve what we say with our mouths or what we think in our minds

B. What a judgmental attitude reveals

1. A lack of love (failure to love neighbor as self)

2. A lack of humility

a. We judge the person, thinking we’re somehow better than they are

b. We judge God’s law (v. 11)

1) God’s royal law commands love of neighbor as ourselves

2) We’re essentially saying we know better than the law. We’re saying the law should actually command judgment, not love

c. We judge God himself who gave us the law (v. 12)

1) James reminds us that God alone is capable of judging people, and his judgment alone holds validity and consequences (only his judgment has the power to save/destroy)

2) James reminds us that while God has the power to destroy us, he has chosen to be merciful to us (so we should be the same to others)

3) James is putting us in our place: “who are you?”

Are judgments are powerless and lack full knowledge

d. Example: Dave (who knows nothing about gymnastics) presuming to know what scores his daughter deserves better than the judges.

III. Matthew 7:1-5

A. Jesus similarly sets our human judgments in the light of God’s judgment

B. Jesus points out how good we are at seeing the little problems in others while avoiding the glaring problems in our own lives. He prescribes focusing on ourselves before seeking to help others.

IV. Yet, Christians are called to be discerning and to even call each other out at times

A. Consider Jesus with the woman at the well (John 4), Paul with Peter (Galatians 2), and James throughout this book.

B. Consider James 5:19-20

1. This implies we’ve made a judgment call about someone (=discerned they’re not on a good path)

2. This implies we’re willing to engage them rather than leave them alone to their own devices.

3. But the key is this is rooted in love and humility

V. Conclusion

A. Key image: We are the body of Christ (1 Cor 12)

1. We belong to each other. When one part suffers, we all suffer.

2. When your tooth hurts, you hurt!

3. So when we hear about a fellow believer who is struggling, our response should be not, “HE has a problem. Too bad for HIM.” But “WE have a problem. HE is part of US.” So how can the body come around and bring healing to this member of us?

B. Key Resolutions in the body of Christ

1. I resolve to not have a judgmental thought towards a brother/sister without turning that thought into a prayer to God for their good.

2. I resolve to never make a critical comment about a brother or sister that I don’t intend to make to that person directly (unless asking for prayer for that person or discernment on how best to help them)

3. Before sharing negative information about a brother or sister, I resolve to first prayerfully ask myself why I want to share this information.

4. I resolve to accompany every constructively critical comment towards a person with humility and gentleness .