Sermon on the Mount – Lesson 8
Matthew 7:1-12

Background

- Throughout the sermon, Jesus is teaching us what the kingdom of heaven is like; who are the blessed ones, what it means to keep the full spirit of the Torah, fending off the lure of the world's treasure. 7:1-6 give a sense of how we are to interact with others.
- v.1, do not judge should NOT be taken as an excuse to ignore injustice or others' wrongdoing. Remember Micah 6:8 ("do justice, love kindness, walk humbly with God"). We are still expected to know right from wrong and to stand up for what is right against wrong. We might think of it as, "Do not be judgmental."
- The judgement Jesus speaks of here may have to do with eternal condemnation. In other words, it's not up to us to decide who is "in" with God and who is "out."
- v. 2, Jesus cautions against hypocrisy. Judge others on the same terms you yourself would want to be judged. We are to hold ourselves to the same standards of justice and fairness.
- v.3-5, it can be much easier to see the faults of others (to judge others) than to see our own faults. Earlier, (6:22-23) Jesus said the eye is the lamp of the body. The lamp is dimmed by specks (or logs!). We cannot be the light of the world if we are too busy judging the world. Constantly tending to our own spiritual health and wellness is necessary for disciples. Jesus is encouraging self-awareness.
- v.6, then as now, calling someone a "dog" was an insult, and swine were considered unclean animals.
- In Matthew 13:45-46, Jesus likens the kingdom of heaven to a pearl of great value that a merchant found and then sold all he had in order to buy it. We should not be careless with the precious treasure we have received.
- v.7-11. Ask, search, knock. Earlier (Mt. 6:34) Jesus said to "strive first for the kingdom and its righteousness." Here, Jesus is teaching us that our striving will pay off. We may mess up along the way, but if we keep striving, it will be enough.
- v.12. The Golden Rule. A variation on this saying is found in all major religions. It is a summary of how our interactions with others ought to be handled.
- Elsewhere Jesus says the "Law and the Prophets," i.e. the Torah, is summed up in loving God and loving neighbor. Here it is summed up with the Golden Rule. Are the two related?

Reflection

- How can we protect ourselves from the easy judgmentalism to which we are all sometimes tempted?
- What are some practices for tending our own spiritual health and wellbeing that defend against the "logs" in our own eyes?
- What is the "holy" and what are the "pearls" (v.6) that we sometimes carelessly and foolishly cast off?
- In what ways are you asking, seeking, and knocking as a part of striving for the kingdom? What keeps you going when the kingdom still feels so far off?

Summary

Jesus' kingdom of heaven is a community which cares for both the physical and spiritual needs of others. Throughout this sermon, Matthew is laying out for us what this community looks like. Now, he is encouraging us to seek it.