



**Week Two**  
**Give up Harsh, Condemning Judgements**  
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**2016 Lenten Study**  
**Dakotas Conference of**  
**The United Methodist Church**

Greetings in the name of Christ! I'm Reverend Rebecca Trefz, the Director of Ministries for the Dakotas Conference. This week, we are continuing our journey through Lent as we re-envision the Lenten practices of fasting and self-discipline. But rather than fasting from chocolate or soda or TV—all those good things we typically resist having for these 40 days—we're asking ourselves how we can "Give Up Something BAD for Lent."

To help us discern what that "BAD thing" might be, we turn this week to the Sermon on the Mount. In *Matthew 7:7*, Jesus issued the command, "Do not judge, or you too will be judged." *They are familiar words—words we often direct toward others who we feel are being overly harsh or critical. But they are also directed to us. So the question we need to ask ourselves this week is, "Do I need to give up harsh, condemning judgments for Lent?"*

Now, to be fair, making judgments is part of how we were created. It's part of how humans have stayed alive throughout history—judging an opponent to know whether to fight or flee; judging a territory as safe or unsafe; judging whether someone's cooking is edible or not so much. Making judgements and even placing persons or things in certain categories is actually how our brain is wired to help us make quick decisions about situations and settings.

But this isn't the kind of judgement Jesus was referring to. He wasn't telling us to turn off our brains. Rather, as our chapter describes, he's saying we shouldn't condemn others—that only God is in the place to truly judge someone.

But I think there's more to it than that. You see, the word translated "judge" in this passage is *krino*—a Greek word that can mean, "to separate." And I believe that is a key command from Jesus then and now—don't create separation between yourself and others.

In the Jewish culture that Jesus was speaking to, separation was pretty common. Under Jewish law, there was a long list of things—infractions if you will—that could get you separated from the community. Things you could do or eat or even touch that would make you unclean—unholy—and therefore sentenced to separation from others. People would also use these rules to not only condemn others but also elevate themselves. We hear an example of this from the Pharisee in *Luke*

*18:11, "God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector."*

This was the culture Jesus lived in. And yet, he told them this isn't how it should be. Jesus said that judging someone isn't just critiquing or condemning them. It's creating a separation—a separation between us and the neighbor we are called to love.

Now, we may not live under the code of Levitical laws, but we certainly live in a world that breeds division. We take the human inclination to categorize people for the sake of understanding and adapting and quickly determining what is safe and unsafe and turn it into a simplified version of right and wrong, good and evil, worthy and unworthy. And each time we do this, we separate ourselves from the people we judge—and from the opportunity to love them.

***Please pray with me. Holy and loving God, we confess to you that we often do things, say things or think things that cast judgement and more importantly cast separation. We confess Lord that it is often easier to categorize someone rather than get to know them and love them. Forgive us we pray oh Lord. Send your Holy Spirit among each of us this Lenten season. Reveal to us those things that we need to give up throughout our lives not just these forty days. We pray that we may follow you more closely and love the world that you love. We pray these things in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.***

