



The Space Between Us
March 17, 2019

Have two people stand at a distance with nothing visible between them.

Ask everyone, “What is in the space between them.”

It appears to be nothing,

But . . . if you had eyes to see spiritual reality,

 you would see that the space between them is full of *something*.

And that’s true whether you are in the same room, or in different countries.

There may be someone in your life you have shown the door, saying,

 “**Well THAT person is out of my life.**

I don’t have to deal with *them* anymore.”

But the space between you is still there

 and it’s still full of something—

 even if the person is dead, the final door,

 the space remains and is full of *something*.

It’s full of whatever you’ve lobbed into that space, both positive and negative.

The positive things you’ve lobbed into that space produce harmony and good will.

The negative things you’ve lobbed into that space produce clutter and discord.

We all want those spaces to be positive,

 and have a hard time figuring out how on earth they got so cluttered and discordant.

To help us figure that out, we turn to Jesus – where else!

Matthew 7:6 records this strange teaching of Jesus about pearls and pigs.

He says . . .

Do not throw your pearls to pigs.

If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces.

And then Jesus gives no explanation, and we’re left saying, “Huh?”

Well, maybe if I read this in context, it’d make more sense . . .

Let’s see what comes just before this statement.

Matthew 7:1-6

Do not judge, or you too will be judged.
For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged,
and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

“Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye
and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?

How can you say to your brother,

‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,
when all the time there is a plank in your own eye?’

You hypocrite;

first take the plank out of your own eye,

and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.

Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces.

A great teaching about not being judgmental . . . and then the pigs.

I’m still saying, “HUH?”

OK, maybe if we go back *further*.

What does Jesus say just before *this*?

Matthew 6:31-34

So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’

or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’

For the pagans run after all these things,

and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.

But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness,

and all these things will be given to you as well.

Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

OK, Jesus is talking about not worrying.

Then he’s talking about not judging other people.

Then he’s talking about pearls and pigs.

Clear as the mud pigs roll in!

But look deeper.

There is a profound connection between all three teachings.

You see, all three are about CONTROL.

Take WORRY

Why do we **worry**?

Because we want to be in *control* of life to guarantee our own well-being,

But we're not.

That's scary;

so we *worry*.

At its root, worry means we're not entrusting *ourselves* to God.

We don't think he can handle this.

It's problem's unsolvable.

Worrying is our futile attempt to control

instead of entrusting ourselves to God.

OK. How about **judging**?

Judging is wishing we could *control* someone *else*,

using shame, criticism and condescension as our tools of choice.

Judging just is thinking we can shame people into lasting change.

At its core, judging is our futile attempt to use negativity to get people to change,

instead of entrusting them to God.

Which brings us back to those **pearls and pigs**?

How's *that* about control?

Throwing pearls to pigs is trying to control people by giving them good things

(that they don't have to capacity to appreciate)

in hopes of getting them to change.

It might be material gifts, or your great wisdom, or even flattery

(which is praise for the purpose of influencing people).

Giving pearls is really our futile attempt to manipulate people

instead of entrusting them to God;

I was first married in the 70's; it was the hippy generation.

We spurned the traditional and anything that smacked of being ostentation,

and we celebrated the earthy and the plain.

This disturbed my mother no end since she measured herself and others

by how many "nice" things people had.

She was mortified that we used the old telephone-wire spools for our end tables,

hung macramé on our walls and used Coca-Cola bottle crates for decorations.

So one anniversary she bought us a maple end table.
Do you have any idea how bizarre that maple end table looked in our living room?

She was deeply offended when we said, “No thank you.”
Didn't we know how much thought she put into this gift?
Didn't we appreciate how much it cost?

She was throwing pearls to swine, (which makes us the swine).
But her gift wasn't a gift to *us*; it was an attempt to change our taste in décor.
It was an attempt to control us rather than to entrust us to God.

Can you see how these teaching of Jesus speak to the ways we clutter up
the space between us and damage our relationships?

What are you lobbing into the space between you?

Are you lobbing in worry and anxiety or it's cousin, depression?
Feel the static build to intolerable levels.

Are you judging others, being critical, fault-finding and condescending
Unable to stop trying to change the other person,
Until the space between you is so full of negativity, its barely navigable.

Are you lobbing in pearls hoping to control and change the other's behavior?
Once that pearl of an end table got lobbed into the space between me and my mom,
I lobbed back resentment, and she lobbed back resentment for not being appreciated,
And before long the dust in our space was greater
than the dust that had accumulated on the end table.

We lob these things into our space in our futile attempt to bring change, BUT
we discover that the objectionable attitudes and behaviors we want to change
only become more entrenched, as if the other person is saying,
“Stop trying to change me!”

The space between us continues to be full of *something*
and both people intuitively know what's it is,
but don't always know how it got there or how to get rid of it.

The smallest little things can get into the space between you.

I've heard people say,
“I don't know why you're upset, I didn't *say* anything; I didn't *do* anything!”
and yet everybody feels that the space is cluttered with negativity.

My distress and worry, even if unspoken, is always felt.

Mysterious as it sounds, even your negative thoughts about yourself
get lobbed into that space and have their effect.

Even the smallest gesture can lob judgment into that space;
like the rolling of an eye or a dismissive door closing.

Or the “innocent” compliment designed to control behavior.

Even our *attitudes* toward the other person are in that space.

Everything, including your past and your addictions and your secret world,
get lobbed into that space.

We may think that the other person will never know our thoughts, but they do.
They may not know them specifically, but they are felt.
Everything in the space between you is has its effect.

It's just in the air we breathe.

There's a story in the Old Testament that captures
how what's in the space between effects our reactions to people.
It's a story that involves the King of Israel and King of Aram.

Aram was one of the arch enemies of Israel.

2 Kings 5:1-7

Now Naaman was commander of the army of the king of Aram.
He was a great man in the sight of his master and highly regarded,
because through him the Lord had given victory to Aram.

So what do you think is in the space between The King of Aram and the King of Israel?
Competition, power struggles, distrust, resentment, vengeance, antipathy
It's not pretty.

Here's how the story goes.

Namaan was a valiant soldier, but he had leprosy.
Now bands of raiders from Aram had gone out and had taken captive a young girl from Israel,
and she served Naaman's wife. She said to her mistress,
"If only my master would see the prophet who is in Samaria!
He would cure him of his leprosy."

Naaman went to his master and told him what the girl from Israel had said.
"By all means, go," the king of Aram replied.
"I will send a letter to the king of Israel."
So Naaman left, taking with him ten talents of silver,
six thousand shekels of gold and ten sets of clothing.
The letter that he took to the king of Israel read:
"With this letter I am sending my servant Naaman to you
so that you may cure him of his leprosy."

What are the intentions of the King of Aram?
He sincerely wants to save the life of his commanding officer, Naaman.
Best of intentions and motives.

However . . .
As soon as the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his robes and said,
"Am I God? Can I kill and bring back to life?
Why does this fellow send someone to me to be cured of his leprosy?
See how he is trying to pick a quarrel with me!"

Why did he respond to a sincere request for help with such suspicion and anger?
Because of what was sitting in the space between them.
It caused him to interpret the letter as a hostile trap.

That's what we do.
We interpret other people's actions in light of what's in the space.
We see what we're *expecting* to see.
We see only what proves us right
in our assessments and judgments of the other person.

This space in between us is so powerful.
At first, it's just a speck.
We don't pay it much mind, because the bulk of the space between us is just fine,
and we carefully navigate around that speck of dust.

But here's the thing about these specks of dust.
They start to attract more dust.
Now the spots are getting larger and coming into the space more frequently.

One day you wake up and find that the space is a hot mess,
and there is no more room to navigate the relationship.

During lent, we are asking for eyes to SEE
what *we* have been lobbing into the space between us.
Lent is a time to declutter that space.

**Let me share a story from our own church family
of how the Lord helped declutter a space that was rather a hot mess.**

We have been going through an exercise in our 12-step group
of clearing out the spaces in our relationships.
We are asking God to help us to forgive the people in our lives who have hurt us,
either willfully or as a result of human frailty
and to protect us from holding people hostage to our judgments.

We had our list of people where we knew there was lots of clutter in that space.
We said nothing to the other people on our list.
We just prayed, asking the Lord to change *our* attitudes.
And then, as is often the case, we were surprised when God answered our prayer.
Something changed in the spiritual realm.

One person on Linda's list called her to express a sincere expression of praise
for what she has contributed to the people in her the family.
Whereas in the past, Linda shared, she would have seen this praise as a pearl,
a manipulative ploy to control her.
But this time she was able to receive the expression of gratitude at face value.
Somehow, the space between them had changed.
It got decluttered.
Something got healed.

**That is the work the Lord is calling us to this Lenten season.
We're called to declutter the space.
We're are called to return that space to a space of love and good will.**

Can you take out the worry and anxiety that's been cluttering the space
and instead entrust *yourself* completely to God?

Can you take out the judgments you've made of the other person,
hoping to change them through your criticism
and instead entrust *them* to God??

Can you take out the pearls that you've lobbed in,
trying to manipulate and change others
and instead entrust them to God.

The irony is that when you take out the worry and the judgments and the pearls,
take out all our attempts to control
you set a spiritual law in motion
that actually frees the other person to be able to change.

What we all need is fresh air in the space between us.

It starts by breathing in holy air so that we exhale holy air.

This is the air I breathe
This is the air I breathe
Your holy presence living in me