**The Measure That We Give is the Measure That We Get**

**Sermon by the Rev. Bernadette Hartsough**

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Last week the Beatitudes talked about our own personal dispositions and characteristics. This week it is about our actions, namely our relationships with others. We do not choose which family we are born into, which country and what year. As I stand here in February of 2025 my path crosses with those who were born in Plymouth, some people were born in other states, and other countries. We are different ages from different cultural backgrounds. At this moment some of you are married, some are widowed, some are divorced, some are single. Yet here we are called in this particular time and place. We are called to be together and what we do with this “togetherness” is up to us.

What if everyone judged us by the way we treated others? Every wrong word. Every cruel thought we think about others. Every time we knowingly or unknowingly hurt someone. I think we would have a lot of trouble. Jesus ends his teaching of the Sermon on the Plain with a warning to be cautious about our relationships and how we treat others.

“Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back”.

The last part of this passage refers to the marketplace where people in the ancient world would buy food. To buy grain to make bread, grain was measured. Think of measuring rice to put in a pot. You measure 1 cup of rice. You level it off or maybe even have more than the top line. That’s how grain was measured and then if you did not have a basket, you would open your tunic or cloak, and it would be put into your cloak. Jesus uses this example to make his point and to warn us. If you are seller you need to fill the cup and not cheat the buyer. That is the measure for how we treat others. Jesus is implying that God could use our measure, our standard for how we treat others to treat us. God is merciful so be merciful as God is merciful. Be generous because God will use our generosity or lack of it to judge us. But God is supposed to be merciful you might say. Yes, God is merciful, but it is up to God to decide when and how to give mercy.

As I thought about mercy in our human court systems, I reflected on who is a criminal and who gets mercy? Also, who decides the acts that make someone a criminal?

I have read alot these days about immigration and what is Biblical. The Babylonian Code of Hammurabi is probably the oldest record of a legal code. Much of what we have in the Old Testament Law of Moses and the Ten commandments is almost identical to the Code of Hammurabi. The acts of stealing, murder, and false witness were considered criminal offenses.

What about foreigners? What about immigration laws?

In the context of ancient Mesopotamia, immigrants were individuals who moved to Babylon from other regions, often in search of better opportunities. Babylon was a bustling center of commerce, attracting merchants from various regions. Many fled to Babylon as refugees to escape conflicts or invasions in their homelands. The promise of jobs or land ownership was a significant draw for many. That sounds familiar and very modern.

Immigrants had legal rights in Babylon. They had the right to own property and conduct business, the right of legal protections against unjust treatment or exploitation and access to legal recourse in cases of disputes. With these rights came certain obligations. Immigrants were expected to adhere to Babylonian laws and customs, contributing to the social and economic fabric of the city. They had a duty to respect the local governance and participate in community life. The code of Hammurabi lists specific cases of immigrants being protected by the law. One was a merchant who was cheated, and another was denied the right to buy property. Both were protected under the law. These cases highlight the practical application of Hammurabi’s laws, emphasizing justice, fairness, and the protection of immigrant rights within the legal system.

In Mosaic Law, which Jesus was born under, the treatment of strangers, or foreigners, is very similar. The laws highlight the ethical and moral obligations of the Israelites towards those who are not native-born. The term "stranger" in the Hebrew context often refers to a "sojourner" or "alien" residing temporarily or permanently among the Israelites.

In [Exodus 22:21](https://biblehub.com/exodus/22-21.htm) , it is commanded, "You must not exploit or oppress a foreign resident, for you yourselves were foreigners in the land of Egypt." This commandment serves as a reminder of the Israelites' own history as strangers in Egypt, fostering empathy and fair treatment towards foreigners. [Leviticus 24:22](https://biblehub.com/leviticus/24-22.htm) states, "You are to have the same law for the foreigner and the native-born. I am the LORD your God." This principle ensures that strangers are afforded the same legal protections and obligations, reinforcing the idea of impartiality before the law. Some of the verses in Exodus talk about the wrath of Yahweh if you mistreat the foreigner.

Ancient societies did not conceive of citizenship as we do and often thought more of one’s home village or tribe than participation in an entire nation. The law may cover both migrants from outside Israel who reside far from home and non-Israelites.

The three groups of vulnerable people—widow, orphan, and foreigner—lacked the natural protection of family connections and thus faced potential discrimination and abuse. They could easily lose their property to fraudsters and bullies. Hence the laws against such behaviors. This description of the most vulnerable sounds familiar; not much has changed in 3,000 years.

I am very concerned right now about our immigration system. Are we a country that provides safe refuge to those in need? Are we showing care and compassion to the stranger like God commands in Exodus, Leviticus, Deuteronomy and other texts? I hope and pray that our government officials that are reworking our immigration system reflect on our foreign-born brothers and sisters and remember Jesus’s words, The measure that we give is the measure that we will receive”.