

(re)orient: Putting it Down

John 5:21-24, 30

Intro

Last Sunday we talked about the whisper that is heard in so many of our kid's lives, so many of our lives, that whisper that says, 'there's something wrong with me'. We entered into that conversation through a variety of statistics and concluded the service with writing down the names of kids, schools, people of all varieties in our lives whom we look at in one way or another and feel are dealing with the reality of that whisper, that lie, permeating into their life.

I've left the prayer wall up here both to act as a reminder that those prayers that were offered were not just for that particular moment in that particular service (yes, these are prayers that need to be offered up in an on-going, breathe in, breathe out fashion), but also to invite anyone who would like to take that visceral step of writing down the name of someone who is dealing with the reality of hearing that lie to come forward at the conclusion of the worship service and add their balloon to the board. We need to reorient and that is something that needs to take place yesterday, today, every day.

The reason that I wanted to provide the quickie recap is because when I asked a few folks what they thought about the service, there were two generalized responses that showed up. First, that that was something that was very important to talk about.

This was followed quickly by, 'is prayer our only response?' When expounded upon, the thought was, 'okay, we're praying...now what?'

That is not meant as a shot at prayer: it's not. Prayer reorients us back to a connection with God and that reorientation begins to ground us in the reality of God's promises of love, forgiveness, and grace.

And prayer is not the only tool we have at our disposal.

As I listened further to the reflection that people had about last week, conversation began to center around judgement and how judgement and fear of judgement drives so many people to do what they do, or avoid doing whatever they avoid doing, to listen to the lie (there's something wrong with me). Sometimes that judgement comes from within (how many times have we heard, 'I'm my own worst enemy'); other times it comes from those who are around us; and still other times, especially through some sort of lens of faith, we also are shaped by what we imagine God's judgement to be.

It was with those seeds in place that it felt important to talk about judgement, not only what it is and who ultimately passes it, but how we, as people who have been blessed with even the smallest kernel of faith, should respond and live. As you listen to the following passage (and we are back to Jesus Sermon on the Mount), start to think about this: how judgmental are you toward others? Toward yourself? Are they connected? How so? The scripture reads this way.

John 5:21-24, 30

²¹Indeed, just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whomsoever he wishes. ²²The Father judges no one but has given all judgement to the Son, ²³so that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. Anyone who does not honor the Son does not honor

the Father who sent him. ²⁴Very truly, I tell you, anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life, and does not come under judgement, but has passed from death to life.

30 'I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge; and my judgement is just, because I seek to do not my own will but the will of him who sent me.

John 8:2-11

Intro

With that foundation in place, not only in terms of our worship here today, but also in regard to the narrative in John, we hear how Jesus, the one who has been given authority to pass judgement, begins to yield it in his day and time. As you hear this familiar story, again ask yourself, how judgmental are you toward others? Toward yourself? Are they connected? How so? The scripture reads this way.

John 8:2-11

²Early in the morning he came again to the temple. All the people came to him and he sat down and began to teach them. ³The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery; and making her stand before all of them, ⁴they said to him, 'Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. ⁵Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?' ⁶They said this to test him, so that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. ⁷When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, 'Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.' ⁸And once again he bent down and wrote on the ground. ⁹When they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the elders; and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. ¹⁰Jesus straightened up and said to her, 'Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?' ¹¹She said, 'No one, sir.' And Jesus said, 'Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again.'

'(re)orient: Putting it Down'

A few weeks ago I was watching the news when a report about a viral video came on. The video was filmed on a New Jersey Transit train and what it showed was a man sitting all the way against the window, shaving, and I mean full on shaving, with shaving cream and a disposable razor. As I watched it, I remember saying to Jen, 'he's done that before', which was quickly followed up with, 'I wonder what he's going to do with all the shaving cream on the end of the razor?', at which point the video showed the man flinging the shave cream on to the floor before standing up.

So as you hear what I describe, what thoughts cross your mind? You already have an idea as to what I was thinking. What about you?

Well, an interesting thing happened, I ended up seeing follow up reports, including the following couple of paragraphs from Newsweek: 'A man who was derided online after footage of him shaving on a train went viral has asked for public understanding, explaining that he had just spent several days in a homeless shelter and wanted to clean himself up.

In the video, [a man] is seen sitting by himself on an evening New Jersey Transit train, his face slathered with foam, steadily applying the razor. The recording went viral, being watched more than 2.4 million times by Monday and prompting disdain and admonishment from some viewers.

“I never thought it would go viral, people making fun of me,” the man told AP. “I don’t want to say that I’m homeless, let everybody know. That’s why I was shaving.”

“My life is all screwed up,” he said. “That’s the reason I was shaving on the train.”

Just a little more context: he was shaving so that when he got to his brother’s house he would look presentable. He then asked his brother for a sleeping bag so that he could sleep under a bridge because he was so ashamed...and that was before he found out that he became a news story.

So what are you thinking now?

I know what I thought. I know what I felt. The thought that ran through my head is that he still shouldn’t have flung the shaving cream on the ground...and I have no idea how low he is emotionally to feel like that choice is his best option, maybe his only one.

This man, this person, this creation of God got torn to shreds. He was judged up one side and down the other, and if he wouldn’t have responded I would have remained right there with the finger pointers on Twitter.

Hypocrite.

The reason that I bring that example up however, is not to make us feel bad, but in order to bring to light that there are ways that we view ourselves, there are ways that we view others, there are ways that we view the world in general, that are just...screwed up, that are contrary to God. We need to name them, bring them into the preverbal light, so that we might be able to put them down and give ourselves the opportunity to receive a truth that is from God.

So where should we start?

I believe it makes a whole lot of sense to start with how we view ourselves...how we judge ourselves, because ultimately how we see and judge ourselves radiates out to how we see and respond to others.

So, going back to last week, what is the whisper, the lie that so many hear? (There’s something wrong with me.) That whisper, that lie, as we are able to look at so many of the negative responses that are exhibiting themselves across the culture, has taken hold in a multitude of our lives causing us to believe things about God and those around us that are simply not true. I’m not loveable; I’m alone; I can’t be forgiven; I’m a screw-up. These manifestations of that whisper, of that lie (there’s something wrong with me) cause us to look at ourselves with various levels of frustration, to disappointment, to failure, to defeat.

We judge ourselves.

As we reflect upon that reality in our lives, or at the very least in the lives of those who are around us, how does that line up with what we have heard in our passages this morning?

I don’t know about you, but I’m going to go with, ‘not at all.’ Who is empowered to be our judge? Jesus. Jesus is, and when we listen to that whisper, when we respond to that lie that there is something

wrong with me and then being to venture down the path of judging self, we place ourselves in a seat that is reserved for the savior of all creation, the savior of you.

Yes, we need to recognize the sinfulness that is a part of our lives. We need to recognize it and lean upon God and those who walk with us in the faith to, as Jesus says in our second passage, sin no more. But we need to get out of the seat of judgement that has us too often looking in the mirror and declaring ourselves to be guilty (which so very often manifests itself as us seeing a similar reality in those around us who disappoint us in one way or another: aka, they're guilty too!).

When we do this we are buying into the whisper, we are buying into the lie.

We need to stop. We need to let God be God and God has given that responsibility, that authority to His son. Hear a reworked version of the story that we heard in John 8. A person who had screwed up is brought before the judge of all. The people who have brought the individual who has sinned are looking for the judge to pass condemnation. But the judge, even in recognizing the wrong committed, does not condemn. Instead, grace is extended. Yes, the call to sin no more is absolutely there, and it stands upon a grace that is all encompassing.

That is the truth. That is for all of us. That is our judge!

So this morning, in addition to prayer, we are going to take an active step away from the lie that there is something wrong with me. In each of the pews you have been provided a piece of paper. On that paper I would like write down your variation of the lie that there is something wrong with you. I don't know what your variation might sound like...but you do. Bring it into the light, write it down, knowing who your judge was, is, and always will be.

How we're going to do that is we are going to take 30 seconds to close our eyes, slow our breathing, and ask God to tell us how we are believing the lie. If this exercise isn't for you, then please be actively prayerful for those who need to articulate these mistruths.

Examples? I'm not a good enough daughter, or parent..., I don't have any friends, I don't have as much faith as everyone else, I don't do enough, I am fat so not worthy of love... No one wants to be my friend... I mess up all the time... If I don't have a certain amount of money in the bank, I am a failure....If I have credit card debit – I am a loser... If I don't have the right clothes, no one will like me...there are all sorts of variations on the theme. How do you judge yourself?

Slow down, close your eyes, and ask, 'God, what lie do I believe about myself?'. **30 second pause**

Now write it down and fold the paper shut. Fold it as tightly as you would like and then hand it to toward the center aisle for the Elders to collect. What they're going to do...is shred those lies. Much like a prayer of confession, we need to acknowledge that which is wrong so that we might have the opportunity to receive that which is true.

Put down the lie, the judgement that you carry in regard to yourself. **Shred**

Now that that's done, we need to open ourselves to God's truth. We shred the lie and have the opportunity to receive God's truth, not only that Jesus is our judge and savior, but something more personal. We're going to write these down as well, but these will be on the balloon stock that we used

last week, and it is for you to take with you to remind you, not only of the lie that God has led you to walk away from, but more importantly the truth that God is leading you toward.

So we're going to take another 30 seconds of prayerful silence. Slow down, close your eyes. Offer up the prayer, 'God, You have led me to walk away from the lie of (fill in your blank)...what truth would You like me to know about myself?'

Think about the prayer of confession: what do we receive after we put down the brokenness that we carry? God's direction in the Summary of the Law. It's the same sort of thing.

Slow down, close your eyes. Offer up the prayer, 'God, You have led me to walk away from the lie of (fill in your blank)...what truth would You like me to know about myself?' Listen...feel. **30 second pause**

Now write it down. Whatever you heard or felt, write it down...and if you didn't hear or feel anything...that's okay! Keep asking: an answer will come. Hold on to this truth and look at it throughout the day, the week, however long you need it. Remind yourself of the truth of who you are so that when the lie starts to whisper back into your life (and maybe that's right now), you can be reminded of who you are, who God is, and how God will always see you: let God be God and know that you are that precious to God!

Last week we opened the door to talking about the lie that whispers into so many lives and this week we've taken another step of confronting it in our own lives. It may not feel like much, but even the smallest step back to God reorients us how the judge of all will always see us as worthy, as precious, as loved, now and forevermore.

After Sermon Prayer

Holy God, we approach You as a people who so freely judge, not only others, but absolutely ourselves. God, help us to continue to name the lies that are a part of our lives so that Your Spirit might be able to breathe even greater truth into how we see ourselves, reorienting so that that we might be able to catch even the faintest of glimpses of how You have always seen us. Lord, let it be so. Amen.