



## LESSONS for LIFE

March 22, 2009 7 p.m.  
**8 LIFE CHANGING MESSAGES FROM JESUS**  
**JUDGEMENT AND FORGIVENESS**  
Rev. Jo Bell

### SACRED READINGS

**Lesson:** from Matthew 7

**Gospel:** from John 8

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Rev. Jo Bell

We're in the middle of a series we are working on about the life changing lessons of Jesus.

Brent shared a bit about how we're doing one person's perspective in the morning and another person's perspective in the evening. And how exciting that has been to see these same stories, these same journeys really, from one perspective and then from another perspective, just proving the point, really that no matter how many times we hear the stories in our sacred text, they can be new and fresh every time. Most of that, I believe, is because from the last time I read this stuff, to the time I read it again, stuff has happened in my life. Circumstances, lessons, things that I now know, so that when I come back to that story, I'm the one that's different, and therefore the lens I read it through changes, my interpretation, my understanding, is fresh and new.

So I invite you into some of these stories that shaped our faith, and tonight we're talking about judgement and forgiveness. Now you've probably never really heard a sermon preached on either of those, have you? Or a million sermons preached on those- how do we make it new? How do we keep it going?

And for Brent's inspiration, doing what he normally does, working out with God, Saturday morning on his treadmill, and his inspiration showed up, as for mine, I've been reading so much lately of Eckhart Tolle's work, and really working with that, the power of being present, to what's right here, right now, not to what was, or what is going to be. But right now, and how that can change my relationship with self. My relationship with the sacred, and my relationships.

So tonight I'd like to ask you to hold a few thoughts, to hold these certain scriptures in the side community, inside relationship, my friend that's the great way to understand the character of God, the community of God, the relationships, and how the many teachings of Jesus were about how to be in a relationship with self, with God, and with others.

And I also want you to hold a term tonight called the softening of the heart. I'll get to that a little later, but just hold that in the present moment with each of you. From the gospel of Matthew, our first reading, it says, Do not judge, so that you will not be judged. For with the judgment you make, you will be judged, and with the measure you give, you will be given. Why do you see the speck in your neighbour's eye, but do not see the



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plank in your own? Or how do you say to your neighbour let me help you take this speck out of your eye, while there is still a log in your own eye? Hypocrites- first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbour's eye.

Now I've been really enjoying preaching from the gospels and going back and reading about them and also reading about the different perspectives that these authors had on the same events. There are three gospels, Matthew Mark and Luke, known as the synoptic gospels, and what that means, is that pretty much, they're very very similar in their recounting of the activities of Jesus life and yet they are a little bit different. And most scholars believe they are a little bit different because by the time these were taken out of oral history and into written history that each of the authors had a different audience in mind that he was writing to. And therefore if I was writing to a Jewish audience, then bringing in the Hebrew scriptures and talking about the prophets and bringing that forward into the gospels would be important.

Matthew did not necessarily do that. Matthew was a, Matthew and Luke actually, the scholars think, the authors of Matthew and Luke had the gospel of Mark already in their hands. They also believe they shared a second document that was similar, and then they each took their spin.

So when you read Matthew, Mark and Luke, you'll get a different perspective but you'll hear many of the same stories of the life of Jesus. Now in Matthew, it was interesting for me, because you look at it and I say what would get Jesus so riled up, to call people names- hypocrites, he yelled, and if you think about it, the log in our eye. What could be the log in our eye that he was so upset about? What couldn't we get around, that we were ignoring? You know, is there a bias in your life, do you come from a place of privilege that you don't even see? Is there an ignorance, something you don't even know about, and yet by ignoring that thing, it absolutely has to shape how you see anything.

If that log is in your eye...use the metaphor, allow the metaphor to speak to you. Look at where Matthew's coming from, where did this instruction, that just says do this and the measure in which you do it, the measure in which you give, the measure in which you forgive, is exactly what's gonna come back and circle round to you. Which goes back to proving my point that Jesus was a quantum physicist.

So often I think we do forget that if we do journey of self first, if we work with that log until that log isn't there any more, we may actually be more able to work with another person in relationship to take a look at the speck in their eye. But if that log is in there blocking our view, even though we can't see it, can your neighbour see it? Even if you can't see your own bias, can your neighbour see it?

The second text for this sermon comes out of the Gospel of John, not one of the synoptics. The Gospel of John actually stands apart from Matthew and Mark and Luke and it's a much more mystical. If you read it next to Luke, you can hear the authors' different voices, the detail and the logic and the great prose of Luke, and then the mystery and the metaphor and the imagery in the Gospel of John. John also sets apart because John sets apart who Jesus was, as compared to Matthew Mark and Luke. John sets apart because he states Jesus is the incarnate word of God. The gospel that shows that Jesus was with God in the beginning cocreating and it says that through Jesus all things that were created came into being. That Jesus was the actual source of light and



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life. And the author of John says that Jesus became incarnate and came in human flesh he made known to the rest of humanity the eternal God and until that time none of us could see.

Go back to that log in your eye and think about how even then, people had an image of what messiah would be. They had a story, they had a bias, they had a log in their eye that many of them didn't even see.

This Jesus, very different from their expectation, and he ruled very differently, he judged very differently, if he judged at all.

The reading in the Gospel of John is very familiar to folks if they were raised in the Bible tradition. It starts in Chapter 8 where it says the scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who'd been caught in the act of adultery. And they brought her to stand before all of them and said, teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of adultery. The Law of Moses commands us to stone such women. What do you say?

Now if you do the same thing, if you go back to the very context of this story prior to those exact verses what you're going to find out is that Jesus was kind of in trouble. He knew he was in trouble, he was in danger. He'd been teaching in the temple. And the scribes, I guess the religious authorities of his time were trying to catch him in something that was a chargeable offense, so they could get rid of this teacher, because as he got a larger and larger following, he became to them more and more dangerous. Because Jesus all through the gospels says, this is how you were taught, now I tell you this way.

And he kept flipping their understandings of God and the rules of God and he was dangerous to that status quo. So they were trying to catch him in something with which they could charge him and get him tossed away.

Now what's interesting is that Jesus doesn't say anything. In the story, he bends over and begins to write in the sand. And then, as he was writing, the folks who had brought the woman to him one by one walked away.

What I think is interesting here is that the book of John also is very different from Matthew or Mark or Luke because John often interprets the story for us. Except here.

He leaves it blank. What did he write in the sand? What did he write that shut them up?

Now again, many many sermons on this, and to me this lends itself to many bad theologies, because I've been taught exactly what he wrote. I've been taught by people who somehow know, the sins of the ones who were there, in the sand. And he said, the ones among you who are without sin, go ahead and cast the first stone.

The first one of you who doesn't have a sin in your life, the first one, go ahead and knock yourself out, cast that stone. Except the Jesus that I know, the one that knew God in a way that I don't know that any of us have reached that point again, would he embarrass those guys? Would he write down their deepest, darkest so that they could have shame around them? Or maybe, would he write something down that invited them to a softening of their hearts. Now I don't know what he wrote down. But I try and know the character of God through the actions of Jesus.



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And there's a few friends and I who gather in each other's homes once a week and we do some readings and we talk and the only real purpose of this gathering besides really nice meals is to be for each other, to be in relationship, and to be more for each other.

And one of those readings we had a few weeks ago was on forgiveness, and when I saw this sermon title it connected very deeply to me and I'm working very hard on this process. Because in both of these scriptures I believe Jesus is asking us, inviting us, to a new level of understanding, an understanding of how much less judgement we need, and of how much more forgiveness would serve relationships, would serve community. And this woman named Mary Robinson Reynolds says that the energy of love instantly transforms and heals the human body, mind and psyche, yet it is the very thing which we withhold when we are angry and upset with someone.

Hear that again. It is the very thing that heals and transforms, and yet when you're in a tough relationship, and aren't they all tough at one point or another, that's the moment when we withhold forgiveness, compassion, and if it goes back to the measure you withhold is the measure you get, think about it, this is not hard folks, this is not rocket science. This is quantum physics, but it's not rocket science.

Where in those moments where you can extend yourself she says what will happen is that you will create a softening of the heart. Love has no other end stake except healing. And if you can find a way in those hard moments when you probably want to judge more than forgive If you can find a way to be in the present moment, remember that you have a choice to send love or to send judgement. When you know that you know that you know that the measure that you send is returned unto you. What did he write in the sand?

Think about it. Remember, it was never really about the woman. She was just a means to an end. They were trying to trip him up. But he writes in the sand. The danger leaves. And he says, who accuses you, woman? Where are those who condemn you now? And he says I don't condemn you either. GO and be free.

Jesus knew that his calling was to preach good news to the poor and to proclaim freedom to the prisoners and to give recovery of the sight to the blind.

May our journey of lent and our discoveries of these life changing lessons allow us to do our own work to see and to extend forgiveness and to work on the softening of our hearts. Amen.