

December 1, 2023

First Lesson: Proverbs 3: 5-6

Gospel Lesson: John 8: 1-11

Sermon Series: Questions that Move Mountains Week 4: Has No One Condemned You?

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- We are in week 4 of an 8 -week sermon series called “Questions that Move Mountains?” This is a sermon series that invites us to unpack the questions that Jesus either asked or inspired; with the hope that our repeating First Lesson of Focus ; Proverbs 3: 5-6 that says to *Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight.*In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths; will take root into our hearts.
- This week the question that we are unpacking to kick off our Advent season is Jesus’s question to the woman who was about to be stoned for adultery; **Has no one condemned you?”**

- Before unpacking this question, I want to first share how the season of Advent connects us to our faith.
- In the busyness of our lives, it is all too easy to lose sight of the deeper meaning of this season.
- Advent calls us to pause, to step back from the frenetic pace of the world around us, and to enter into a sacred waiting.
- It is a waiting not marked by idleness but by active expectation, a preparation of heart and soul for the coming of our Lord and Savior.
- The liturgical color of Advent, symbolically purple, speaks to us of penance and royalty.
- It is a time of repentance, a call to turn our hearts back to God, acknowledging our need for God's mercy and grace.
- At the same time, the Advent wreath, with its candles progressively lighting the darkness, reminds us that even in the midst of the world's shadows, the light of Christ shines brightly.

- Each candle represents a different aspect of our journey – hope, peace, joy, and love.
- And so now I am inviting us all to dive into the Scriptural and traditional part of our gospel this morning to see where we can gain this glimpse of hope.
- At first glance, I would be remiss if I did not name that this passage is not a typical scripture that we would normally glean from during the Advent season.
- However, dare I suggest that there is evidence that this scripture contains a powerful call to action for us to consider of why the world needs God's grace and mercy like never before;
- For what we are witnessing is one of the most popular New Testament scriptures that many people know even without knowing;

- For it is known for its infamous words from Jesus in vs. 7 ; “Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone.”
- It is generally agreed that this portion of the Gospel of John was not part of the original; it cannot be supported with sufficient textual evidence.
- However, the story is true to the spirit of the Gospel and it fits quite naturally into the narrative at this point.
- The scribes (not chief priests as in the last story) and the Pharisees set the stage to trick Jesus into committing Himself concerning an interpretation of the law of Moses.
- One the scene we have the adulterous woman, her accusers, the missing man, and the pointed question, **Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?”** (8:5).

- The effect of the response made by Jesus was to put the scribes and Pharisees, rather than the woman, under judgment.
- His silent writing in the dust provoked them to greater insistency for an answer, but His single remark caught them in their own guilt—*let he without sin cast the first stone!*
- One by one they slipped away silently. To the woman Jesus pronounced His judgment upon her case by saying to her (v 10) “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?”
- The woman’s reply in (v11) “No one, sir.” And Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again.”
- There was a lot of conversation surrounding this story from our class on Wednesday night; *Applying the Sermon to Life.*
- For if one were to take this story at face value, it is infuriating to say the least.

- For many of the classmates were disturbed that the woman was the only one on “trial” for this affair.
- One of our aspiring biblical scholars who happens to be a lawyer provided another passage for us to consider concerning the matter from Leviticus 20:10, that pointed out that the elders were not following the law to the “T” because the law actually says that ‘If a man commits adultery with another man’s wife—with the wife of his neighbor—both the adulterer and the adulteress are to be put to death!’
- Some of the students named that the woman was set up.
- Some of the students questioned if the woman was even caught in the act or if this too was fabricated.
- All of these questions really leads one to ask what is really going on in this story?
- For this story once again only appears in the book of John.

- No one understands what Jesus is writing in the sand and furthermore why he does it twice.
- So why is this story important for us today?
- Set aside that this is one of many triggering passages in the Bible that continues to show how much the culture then and sadly now continues to brutalize, ostracize and demonize women from all walks of life—strangely I find myself not called to preach about women issues today—but don't worry, I'll most likely preach this from that perspective at another time and for another occasion....but not today.
- Instead I am inviting us to look at this entire pitch fork, stone throwing mob scene as a picture of the church.
- What if we used this entire scene as a metaphor for the Church?
- And suddenly placing this imagery here; at the same time reflecting on that slide show that I

presented to you last week with the stick figures if you all remember that—

- As a side note, the Wednesday class really was drawn to the picture that had the stick figures yelling at one another along with the two trees yelling at one another.
- This is a long way of my naming that if we were to take this stoning scene as an imagery for the church, I believe that it could provide some insight for what Jesus was writing in the sand;
- For one of the most insightful things that our Wednesday class did name is that in Jesus writing in the sand, it was an attempt to allow every one to take a chance to calm down and reflect upon their actions.
- For we have been talking a lot about family systems for weeks now, and so looking at this mob scene from that vantage point; Jesus was giving



this family system a chance to calm itself and enter back into its neocortex again.

- Furthermore in doing so, Jesus teaches us how differentiation manifests in all of us;
- For the old adage came to surface in this sand-writing scene that teaches us that indeed “every action has a reaction.”
- Furthermore another saying comes to mind...that it takes two to tango; and my Kirstie addition would be to name that if one chooses not to dance—then perhaps the music stalls.
- Leaving the people a chance to not only come out of their reptilian, limbic/emotional hysteria—
- But to really take a look at what Jesus is writing in the sand—
- And if I had a go of guessing what he was writing, whether we take this story at face value or accept this story as a metaphor for the Church—I would bet Jesus wrote the words “STOP”

- Stop condemning one another...
- Stop triangulating one another...
- Stop harming one another....
- Stop criticizing one another....
- Stop clawing at one another....
- Stop gossiping towards one another....
- Stop blocking one another....
- Just STOP.
- Thereby making the good news of this text...is that the people stopped....one by one...they dropped their stones....they stopped; allowing the woman to live her life.
- They stopped....allowing the Church to live.
- This past Tuesday, we had 22 people come together to learn about the way forward for Lincoln First United Methodist Church of Nebraska.
- We talked about the exciting prospects of partnering with the Malone Center.

- We shared our questions, our possibilities and it was a great conversation.
- And this is where our conversation landed in front of this picture of this beautiful triptych created by some powerful and prophetic women in our Church who are very much still active and a part of our Church today.
- I led this transition team to recall a story of the meaning of this beautiful piece of artistry;
- The first panel of the triptych reflects the rich history of Lincoln First and all of her beauty. It is amazing how the artists have captured the very beginnings of the Church, that began as a “hole in the ground Church,” where the star reflects a time where larkspur and violet symbolized the rich prairie wheat that once covered the land. Within the history, the rich connection to Nebraska Wesleyan is seen through the sunflower. The strong presence and importance of the community

and its growth is reflected in the column rising from the star. The wheat and water symbolized the Holy Sacraments of Holy Communion and Baptism.

- The second panel of the triptych reflects the vibrant present of Lincoln First. The heart of this panel will draw the eye to the tree of life, that reflects the “people of colors.” Its significance depicts the rich diversity of our congregation. Within this tree, the star is still captured, as it is a symbol of our faith. It is within this panel, that the symbolism of water for baptism, the dove for the Holy Spirit and the grapes of Holy Communion, captures the tradition of our faith. Furthermore, the lily that represents the Resurrection and the Flame of the United Methodist Church, proclaims a strengthened commitment of this faith, where God and community coexists together.
- Finally, the third panel although noticeably open and seemingly vacant at first glance, leaves room

for what is to come in the future. For the reality is that none of us know for sure what the future will bring. It is indeed a mystery that is waiting to be discovered more fully. What is evident to me in the third panel, is that our faith has not dwindled, for the star of our faith is still there. The cross is illumined in such a way, that invites a sense of strengthened faith through Jesus Christ. The promise of Resurrection is reflected in this powerful symbolism of being in the here and the now and in the forevermore! The three flowers represent the Triune God, Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer; that has always been with us at the time of our creation. There is an air of excitement that this panel evokes within me, that because the staples of our faith are still there, lets me know that the possibilities of greatness and richness are still there for the community of Lincoln First United Methodist Church.

- The truest excitement that this picture reflects before us all is a team of people this past Tuesday who arrived to the same conclusion...that it is in this third panel of the Triptych of where we are now.
- **We're here now!**
- All of this and more is why I give special thanks for Zita Schneider, JoAnne Bair, Lois Bowmaster, Judy Lane, Elaine Nelson, and Lois Wilson; wise women who were prompted by the stirrings of the Holy Spirit, to tell our story in such a mighty way, that all generations will be able to live into and relate to fully.
- **Let this candle be a sign of our hope that we can be restored,**
- our faith restored, our strength restored, our confidence restored, our joy restored,
- **as we watch and wait with all God's people for the promise to be fulfilled.**

