

McCabe United Methodist Church

New Year, New Chapter Series

“Adding Weight or Lightening the Load?”

Sermon on John 8: 1-11 (1-15 & 16-17)

Pastor Mark Ehrmantraut

Adapted from *Forgiveness: Finding Peace Through Letting God* by Adam Hamilton

Let's Pray: Holy and merciful God, may the words of my mouth and may the meditations on each of our hearts be acceptable in your sight. You are our Rock and you are our Redeemer. Amen.

We were in Washington DC for a quick trip on Thanksgiving Day. Everything we took fit in our backpacks. Our backpacks were pretty easy to carry. We hopped off the plane in the morning, met our son, and started at it. We had a number of places we hadn't seen before and the crowds were small because it was Thanksgiving Day.

At first, we hardly noticed the backpacks. In fact, we commented how nice it was to be travelling so lightly. And then, 7 hours later, when we checked into the hotel, we could hardly wait to unload the backpacks.

I share this because we're all lugging our own baggage around, aren't we? We all have cares and burdens that can weigh us down...

Adam Hamilton describes it this way...

Picture a backpack. I can carry a backpack around all day. I could even throw a few small rocks in it and I could still carry it around. Even with a few bags of **small** rocks, it's doable. But over time, I'll begin to notice the extra weight.

We might think of those little rocks as harsh words that get spoken or those crabby looks. Maybe each little rock is a little white lie.

We can manage them, but over time, they build up. They start to weigh us down.

Or think about a rock that's a little bigger. It gets our attention faster.

These rocks start to add real weight.

These transgressions are a little more serious. Maybe you hurt your spouse, or, maybe that little white lie wasn't so little. Maybe you've gotten ahead in a way that wasn't honest.

The backpack is getting heavy.

If we don't deal with these, they cause serious pain for ourselves and for others.

And then there's the big ones. You can't carry this weight around too long. These rocks quickly add serious weight. They really bog you down. These sins get you fired or thrown in jail.

We're talking about core violations of trust. These end up in divorce or a lost friendship.

The bigger the rock the quicker it wears us out.

So with this in mind, hear our reading from the Gospel of John again as the load builds up and as Jesus lightens the load.

John 8

A Woman Caught in Adultery

8 Jesus returned to the Mount of Olives, ² but early the next morning he was back again at the Temple. A crowd soon gathered, and he sat down and taught them. ³ As he was speaking, the teachers of religious law and the Pharisees (the religious ones. They) brought a woman (to Jesus) who had been caught in the act of adultery. They put her in front of the crowd.⁴ "Teacher," they said to Jesus, "this woman was caught in the act of adultery. ⁵ The law of Moses says to stone her. (And these guys had shown up loaded for bear. They were going to kill her by (throwing rocks at her. They were going to kill her by) stoning.

Let's pause here for a moment...

This idea of stoning. We hear this Scripture and we know what it means to stone someone. But sometimes it's good to pause again and consider what's going on here.

In a stoning the person might get buried up to just below their waist. They might have a hood put over their head. They might not. Then, the accusers would form a circle around the person and throw rocks until the person slumps over and dies.

In our Scripture, we don't exactly know the method other than stoning, but stoning is not a sterile, clean death.

The men asked Jesus: The law of Moses says to stone her. What do you say?"

- Do you hear the bitterness and the judgment?
- Do you hear the hate weighing them down?

The law of Moses says to stone her to death and verse 6 continues:

⁶ (These guys) They were trying to trap (Jesus too) him. (They were trying to trap Jesus) into saying something they could use against him, but Jesus stooped down and wrote in the dust with his finger. ⁷ They kept demanding an answer, so he (Jesus straightened up, or he) stood up again and said, "All right, but let the one who has never sinned, (Let him) throw the first stone!"⁸ Then he stooped down again and wrote in the dust.

Jesus was talking to the religious folk, the PILLARS of faith. They were judging and condemning the woman AND in the process, they were trying to trap Jesus.

- Do you hear the burdens piling on?
- Their jealousy and judgment was consuming them.

But Jesus offered the men an out and he opened the door for the woman to be freed too.

Jesus offered to accept the load.

⁹ When the accusers heard this, they slipped away one by one. They started with the oldest, until only Jesus was left in the middle of the crowd with the woman.

There were maybe a few lingering rocks for the men. Their pride may have been wounded.

And As the men were leaving, maybe the woman's load started to lighten.

¹⁰ Then Jesus stood up again and said to the woman, "Where are your accusers? Didn't even one of them condemn you?"

¹¹ "No, Lord," she said.

And Jesus said, "Neither do I. Go and sin no more."

Matthew 11:28-30, Jesus said:

²⁸ "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light."

- This is what we're talking about in this series by Adam Hamilton, isn't it?
- We're talking about lightening the load instead of adding to it.
- We're talking about Forgiveness: Finding Peace Through Letting Go.

Pastor Jenny talked last week about this idea of sin and forgiveness and healing. She noted that sin isn't something Christians use against each other.

Instead, the idea of sin helps Christians think about their relationship with God.

And Sin is anything that draws us away from God, anything that separates us from God.

I'll invite you to pull out the middle bulletin insert, the one with the little figures on one side and the word God on the other.

You may have seen this image before...



On the one side, the people, you and me. We're less than perfect. We mess up and we need forgiveness. Or, someone has hurt us and we need healing.

On the other side is God, perfect in love, Holy, brokenhearted by the separation between us.

And In between, the canyon, a canyon separating us from God.

The more we sin, the deeper and the wider the canyon gets. The more we sin the further we push God away.

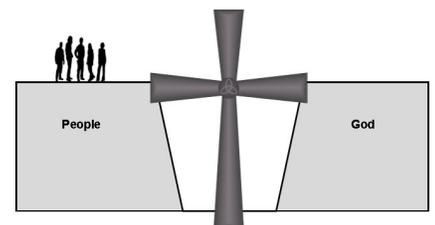
We were created with a longing for God. We want to be connected to God and God wants to be connected with us.

So, on the image, I'd invite you to draw a bridge across the canyon, to draw a bridge to connect the people to God.

Do you have the bridge drawn?

Then, when you have the bridge drawn, draw a line from the bottom of the canyon, through the bridge, to the heaven's above.

What does that make? (It makes a cross.)



And that's the Good News of the Gospel, isn't it? It's the core of what makes us Christian. God loves us so much that God built a bridge to help us connect and reconnect to Him. God gave us a Savior in Jesus Christ.

Through Jesus Christ the bridge is built. Through Jesus Christ we are reconnected to God.

Through Jesus Christ we can ask for, and receive, forgiveness AND through Jesus Christ, true healing takes place.

Pastor Jenny mentioned six words that will change your life. These six words: "I forgive you" and "I am Sorry".

- We're talking about healing and reconnecting and strengthening our relationship with each other and with God.
- We're talking about: Finding peace through letting go.

I was having coffee with a friend last week and we were talking about these 6 words... "I forgive you" and "I am sorry".

This is where it starts to get personal...

This friend shared about a time he was challenged to consider these 6 words and it wasn't easy. It wasn't easy to work on rebuilding that a bridge. It wasn't easy to unload the rocks.

It wasn't easy, but it changed his life.

Maybe the challenge for us this morning is to consider what it will take you to do some bridge building, to work on connecting and reconnecting that bridge to God.

- Maybe you've hurt someone, or, maybe someone has hurt you.
- What will it take for you to begin to lighten the load?

Maybe we start by first, thinking of a person in your own life who has hurt you, OR, someone you've hurt and carry the guilt for the pain you've caused.

- Do you have someone in mind?
- Can you picture someone?
- Then, consider what it means to say either: “I forgive you” OR “I am sorry”.

This isn't a superficial process. This is real, hard, life-changing work if you allow it.

- Keep in mind you can't make someone say it and mean it.
- But YOU get to choose if you offer or withhold forgiveness.
- You get to choose to receive or reject healing if someone has hurt you.

This is what we're talking about this morning. We're talking about allowing Jesus to forgive you and heal you. We're talking about lightening the load.

As we finish up this morning, let's spend some time praying silently. Let's spend some time seeking God's help, praying about forgiveness or praying to allow healing to take place.

Let's pray for Jesus to lighten the load.

Let's begin with Silent Prayer...

Dear God, open my mind and my heart to see where I need to speak and where I need to offer forgiveness. Show me where I need to let go and receive your holy healing.

Forgive us and heal us dear God and may we find peace through letting go.

I pray in the precious and the POWERFUL name of Jesus. Amen.