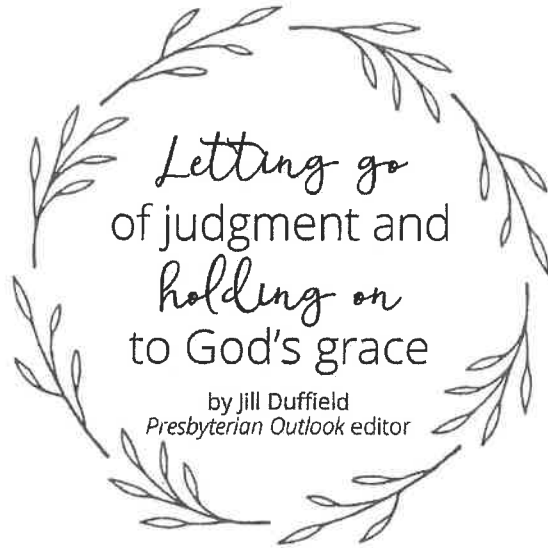


March 29
April 4
2020

Devotions for Lent



Sunday | JOHN 3:16-18

God does not condemn us. Despite our mistakes and missteps, what we have done and what we have left undone, God does not call us out publicly, judge us harshly or sentence us to lifelong punishment. In fact, God so loves us that Jesus is sent to save the world. During this season of Lent, we follow the Son to the cross and grave, to the tomb and back to Galilee, learning all the way about repentance and forgiveness, grace and transformation.

Imagine if those of us reconciled to God through Christ practiced even a modicum of the mercy extended to us? What would it look like for us to let go of judgment and focus instead on extending grace? Consider the impact disciples would make if we sought to be just and not vindictive. What divine inbreaking might happen if we yearned for restoration rather than retribution or revenge?

As Richard Lischer notes in his book, "The End of Words: The Language of Reconciliation in a Culture of Violence," forgiveness always costs someone something. It cost God the Son. As we seek to follow Jesus more closely this Lent, we too are called to extend forgiveness, even though it will inevitably cost us something — our pride, perhaps. Or our need to be right or our desire to see someone get what we think they deserve rather than what our faith calls us to hope for them.

If God does not condemn us, how do we emulate the One we worship, and stop condemning others and instead point them to the saving love of Jesus Christ?

Grace, Alpha and Omega, is difficult for us to stomach. We yearn not so much for universal mercy, but for punishment for others. Instead of celebrating radical transformation, we hold grudges and refuse to believe change is possible. Despite our pettiness and our sin, you refuse to condemn us. You come to save us. May the joyous recognition of such divine mercy shape us into a merciful people. Amen.

Monday | LUKE 6:37-38

What are you struggling to forgive today — in yourself or in others? Why are you holding on to regret or grievances rather than accepting God's forgiveness and opening yourself, your relationships, your communities, to the loving transformation that accompanies grace and mercy? Is there someone you need to contact to either extend or ask for forgiveness? Do it.

Forgiving God, we struggle with patterning our lives after your character. You forgive the most egregious of actions done even to your Son. We refuse to let go of minor affronts and picaresque mistakes. We thank you for showing us mercy. We accept your forgiveness, we commit to repentance, we will extend your grace to the world you so love. Amen.

Tuesday | MATTHEW 9:13

Jesus tells us to go and learn what it means that he desires mercy and not sacrifice. What does this mean? In one sentence write down what you think Jesus wants us to learn from this phrase. Now, how do you practice our Savior's admonishment? How can you extend mercy, rather than requiring sacrifices?

Lord Christ, we live in the hope that you came not for the righteous but to save sinners. We know that we are not righteous and are desperately in need of your grace. There is nothing we could do that would be enough to earn your favor or forgiveness. Thanks be to God, you desire mercy and not sacrifice. Amen.

Wednesday | JAMES 4:12

The Book of James refuses to be theoretical about our faith, always calling us back to how our faith should shape our actions and interactions. Notice today how and who and what you judge. Make note of your assumptions and attempt to suspend them. Be open to meeting each person as the beloved child of God they are.

God, you alone are the judge of people and places, circumstances and behaviors. Yet, we constantly assess and render judgment. Help us to pay attention to how we rate, evaluate and respond to what we encounter. Send your Spirit to give us the eyes to see the world through the lens of faith. Amen.

Thursday | ROMANS 8:1-2

Jesus sets us free from sin and death. Truly, nothing can separate us from the love of God. Nothing. Sit with this astonishing truth for a few minutes. We are not destined to languish in the consequences of sin. In this very moment, in every moment, you are united to God. Remember this truth today.

Liberating God, you set us free to live without fear and in bold faith. Let nothing keep us from lavish generosity, obvious praise, over-the-top joy. May our gregarious living garner the attention of those around us so that we can offer our testimony and tell of your wondrous deeds of power. May our audacious hope be contagious and draw others to you. Amen.

Friday | ROMANS 3:21-25a

There is no distinction among us because all of us are sinners. Think about all the categories we put people in, all the distinctions we think so important. Now, imagine all those distinctions erased and everyone utterly equal before God. How does this change your perception of yourself and others?

We put people in categories, Lord of All, and then we rank them, treat them differently, act as if some are better or more valuable than others. We forget we all fall short of your glory and need your grace. When we remember, we are humbled and chastened. Thankfully, you give us countless opportunities to repent and do better. Amen.

Saturday | 2 TIMOTHY 1:8-10

More than even your vocation, your holy calling entails the core value or values you want to live in faithfulness and glory to God. It bears witness to Jesus Christ and reflects your God-created uniqueness. Write down your moral framework, that which shapes your decisions and remains evident and consistent in your life. Does it reflect and reveal Jesus?

Lord, you enlist us to do your work in the world, to reveal your will and reflect your character. You set us apart for divine purposes, not because we are worthy, but because you are good. Shape us in ways that show the world who you are, whose we are and how you want us to live together. Amen.