

Knox Presbyterian Church
Rev. Emma Duncan
March 23, 2025

THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT

Greetings

Call to worship (PWS&D Lenten Liturgy) – The Marchinkos

One: In Lent, we hear Jesus' call to mend our ways:

All: repentance is necessary no matter who we are.

One: So we come to listen and respond to Jesus' word of life,

All: for the Holy One will abundantly pardon.

One: In returning to the Lord, we trust that mercy will be ours

All: and our lips will again praise the God of life.

Music: Throughout these Lenten days and nights (#196, verses 1, 2, 5, 6)

Prayer of Lament (including The Lord's Prayer)

As is my tradition during the Season of Lent, I have written a prayer of lament for this service. This week's lament is based on our Responsive Psalm, Psalm 51, which is often read during an Ash Wednesday service. King David wrote this Psalm after he was caught in adultery with Bathsheba and then had her husband murdered so that he could have her all to himself. David was called out for his sin and he sought God's forgiveness and mercy with this Psalm.

Let us pray from wherever we are.

Hello God, it's me, Emma, praying with your beloved sons and daughters on the third Sunday in Lent. We gather together to worship you, Lord. We are all seekers on a journey, trying to figure out life and faith. We seek forgiveness and love from you and also from each other.

But the truth is that we are struggling. We feel burdened under so much fear and anxiety, so much sin. To be honest, Lord, there has been little to be joyful about in 2025 so far. Wars rage, the economy is lagging, everything is so expensive, and the homelessness crisis



is weighing us down. Climate change is undeniable and we are worried that our planet is beyond saving. And in the midst of these challenges, who can we trust? Politicians? Business leaders? Celebrities and so-called influencers? Not a single one of them can save us. Not a single one of them offers us true hope.

Sometimes in the depths of our fear, we wonder if we can trust you? Is Jesus Christ, the Messiah, the One who we can really trust?

The Bible teaches us that we can trust you, so hear our cries of lament and deliver us from our sin and shame. O Lord, as King David pleaded with you so long ago, do not hide your face from us. Do not cast us away from your presence or take your holy spirit from us. Restore to us the joy of your salvation. Sustain us in hope.

O God of our salvation, turn our lament into songs of joy and gladness as we renew our trust in you. Give us faith and hope as we say the prayer that our Lord, Jesus Christ, taught us...

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy Name.

Thy Kingdom come.

Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

Assurance of Pardon

In Psalm 51, King David prayed for God's mercy in this way...Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. (Psalm 51: 1, 2, 10) As God forgave David, so too does God forgive our sin through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

People of God - be joyful because we are forgiven in the name of Jesus Christ! Amen.

Announcements

1. Welcome!
2. Join us in the Fellowship Hall after worship for refreshments and conversation.
3. Thank you to the Marchinko family and Hella Hanson for participating in our worship service.
4. Homelessness Petition

There is growing grassroots movement amongst local faith communities that are advocating for all levels of government to put more time and effort into solving the homeless crisis. A recent article in “Burlington Today”¹ indicated that a recent survey in Halton shows that there is a 10% rise in homelessness since 2021.

Please sign this petition. Housing the homeless saves lives, saves money, and possibly saves souls. And it's what Jesus taught. (Matthew 25: 35-40)

5. Upcoming Events

Saturday April 12, 10 a.m. – 1 p.m. Deb to make announcement

Easter Eggstravaganza

Sunday May 4 after worship service

Annual General Meeting

Sunday May 25 in the afternoon

Concert - Circle of Harmony women's *A Capella* choir

Special note – Second Time around Sale is postponed until September.

6. Passing of Dennis Ward

Visitation – Monday March 24 from 5-8 p.m. at Smith's FH on Guelph Line

Funeral – Tuesday March 25 at 1 p.m. at Knox

Music: We come to ask your forgiveness (#201, all verses)

Children's Time: Sticks and Stones

¹ <https://www.burlingtontoday.com/local-news/this-is-a-tragedy-haltons-homelessness-on-the-rise-10404327>

Prayer of Illumination:

Let us pray. Precious Lord, guide the Holy Spirit to touch us with your Word today. Silence our agendas; banish our assumptions; clear the cobwebs from our ears; penetrate the corners of our hearts. We pray that you will do this so that we may let go of our desire to judge others. In the strong name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

Our Old Testament reading is taken from the Book of Psalms and we will be reading Responsively Psalm 51:1-12.

Leader: Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love;

People: according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions.

Leader: Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,

People: and cleanse me from my sin.

Leader: For I know my transgressions,

People: and my sin is ever before me.

Leader: Against you, you alone, have I sinned, and done what is evil in your sight,

**People: so that you are justified in your sentence
and blameless when you pass judgment.**

Leader: Indeed, I was born guilty, a sinner when my mother conceived me.

**People: You desire truth in the inward being;
therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart.**

Leader: Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;

People: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

Leader: Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have crushed rejoice.

People: Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities.

Leader: Create in me a clean heart, O God,

People: and put a new and right spirit within me.

Leader: Cast me not away from your presence,
People: and take not your holy spirit from me.

Leader: Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
People: and sustain in me a willing spirit. Amen.

Our Old Testament reading is taken from the Book of Leviticus and we will be reading chapter 20, verses 10.

“If a man commits adultery with the wife of his neighbor, both the adulterer and the adulteress shall be put to death.”

Our New Testament reading is taken from the Gospel of John and we will be reading chapter 7, verse 53 and chapter 8, verses 1-11.

[[Then each of them went home, while Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. Early in the morning he came again to the temple. All the people came to him, and he sat down and began to teach them.

The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery, and, making her stand before all of them, they said to him, “Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?”

They 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. When 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.”

And once again he bent down and wrote on the ground. When they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the elders, and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him.

Jesus straightened up and said to her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?”

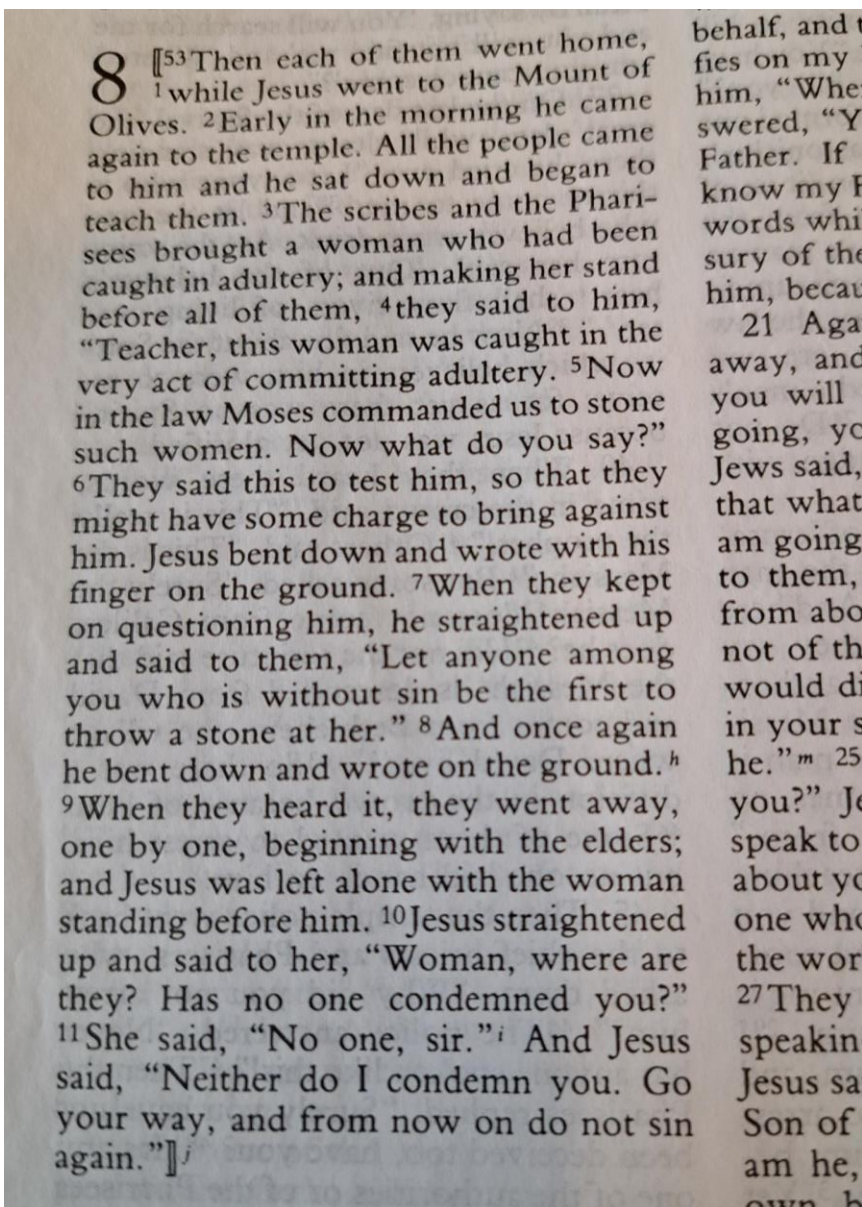
She said, “No one, sir.”

And Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again.”]]

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Reflection: Who will be first?

I would like you to take out a Bible that is in your pew and turn to John chapter 8 which can be found on page 104 in the New Testament. For those of you watching this service online, I have put a picture of this passage on the screen.



Look at the beginning of John 8 – there you will notice that there is a bracket ([[) and then another bracket after verse 11 (]]). These brackets indicate to the reader that there is something unique about this passage according to the editors of the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible. And it is this...the earliest manuscripts of John's Gospel do NOT contain this passage at all. And if they do, it is in a different place in his Gospel. To make matters more complicated, other early manuscripts have this story in the Gospel of Luke towards the end of *that* Gospel. It wasn't until a few hundred years after the resurrection that this story consistently appeared in the manuscripts of the Gospel of John.

So, what does all of this mean?

Is it just interesting trivia for Bible nerds like me? Or is there a reason why this story has been included in God's most holy Word?

Although we can never be 100% sure that this story was included in John's original Gospel narrative, scholars believe that it does have several markings of authenticity. First of all, it fits within the writing style of John, one of Jesus' closest disciples. Also, it is another unique story that supports John's main goal of this Gospel – **that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing in him, you may have life in his name.** (John 21:31)

And for followers of Jesus throughout the ages, it is powerful passage that is both thought provoking and hopeful like so many other stories that we hear in this Gospel.

This encounter has much to teach us today.

As we discussed last week, this story tells us that Jesus was hounded by the religious authorities wherever he went. It is very clear that they were trying to trap Jesus here. That's why it was important for us to hear that one verse from the book of Leviticus. And what does the Law of Moses state about judging people who have been caught in adultery? **Both** parties – men and women – are to be condemned. (Leviticus 20:10) So...the religious leaders who brought this poor woman before Jesus were not following the teachings of their own sacred texts. They did not care at all about this woman – she was simply a pawn in their scheme. She has no name, no personality, no feelings or emotions – she was just an object, a tool, a means to an end. And where was the man? Did they let him go? Or was he there in the crowd, watching from the sidelines? The religious leaders were intentionally manipulating this situation in order to catch Jesus in the act of going against the law of Moses. And even if Jesus correctly quoted chapter and verse from Leviticus, he had no power to put anyone to death because they lived under the authority of the Roman Empire. Only the Romans could condemn someone to death. Remember that in a few short weeks, we are going to hear that Jesus would be bounced between the Jewish and Roman authorities because of this fact. (John 18:28-32) No Jew had the authority to stone this woman to death.

And so, the trap was set.

What did Jesus do? He didn't fall for their trap. Instead, he did two things – first, he turned the tables on the religious leaders...are any of you without sin? Who will throw the first stone at her? When none of them responded, he then did something so beautiful, he forgave the woman of her sin. **I do not condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again.** (John 8:11) By offering her forgiveness – instead of condemning her to death - Jesus replaced the law of Moses with the law of mercy,

forgiveness, and grace. In the midst of Jesus being judged himself, he offered her new life in his name.

I don't know about you, but I am very thankful that this encounter stayed in the Gospel of John. I find it very moving.

In front of Communion Table

I also find it a very challenging text. Because let's face it, we all judge others. It is true that judging others is part of being a human and for good reason. We judge situations so that we can stay safe. We judge people to see if they will help us. I met my husband when I was 11 years old and from that very first encounter, I 'judged' him as someone who I would like to have in my life. 😊

We all judge.

But beyond the judgments that we make to keep us safe, we judge others for the wrong reasons each and every day. One of the commentaries that I read this week challenged preachers to keep a 'judgment diary' for the week leading up to the Sunday when they preach on this passage. I couldn't do this because I know the truth about myself. I judge people all the time. I judge people based on their appearance, especially other women. I judge them based on their actions. I judge politicians, business leaders, and celebrities. I judge family and friends. I judge strangers at the grocery store. I judged people on the day that I wrote this sermon.

Am I any different from the religious leaders who brought the woman to Jesus for judgment and condemnation? No.

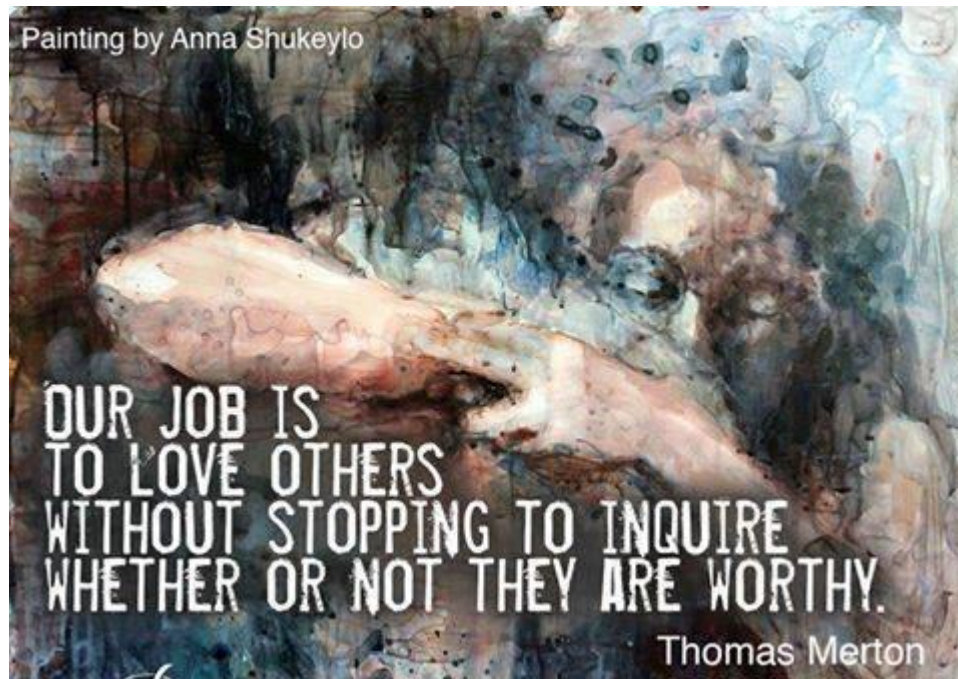
I am not worthy of standing above you in the pulpit.

But aren't we all guilty of this? Yes.

Even here in this sanctuary, you are judging. You judge me every week. You judge me based on my appearance. You judge the hymns that I pick and the prayers that I write. You judge my actions and my words. And you also judge each other.

We are all guilty of this sin.

This interaction in John chapter 8 challenges **all of us** in our daily living to not judge others, to not condemn people because we are unworthy to throw the first stone. Indeed, we aren't worthy to throw **ANY** stones. That is God's job, not ours. As the brilliant theologian Thomas Merton once said, our job it to love others without stopping to inquire whether or not they are worthy.



Friends, I know that this is no easy task. It takes a lifetime of work to become self-aware and stop judging others. But in our broken world – where judgment and condemnation come swiftly - this is more important than ever before. As people of faith, Christ commands us to lift others up instead of tearing them down. To forgive rather than condemn. To love instead of passing judgment. To share God's grace so that the world will have life in the name of Jesus Christ, the Messiah.

To God be the glory. Now and always. Amen.

Dedication of our Tithes and Offerings

We will now sing our song of thanks, - Holy, holy, holy (#303, verse 1)

Holy, holy, holy.
My heart, my heart adores you!
My heart is glad to say the words:
You are holy, Lord

Let us pray. (Not written in advance)

Prayers of the People

O God our Provider, in your mighty power you cause life to spring up out of nothing. You cause the sun to shine, the earth to spin, and life to be born. In the fullness of time, you caused your Son to be born into this world. Throughout his life, Jesus taught us that love is more important than judgment. That forgiveness is more important than condemnation. And on the cross, he taught us these lessons so completely. Now Christ, the Messiah, sits at your right hand in heaven and he advocates on our behalf. We are eternally grateful for Christ's compassionate loving kindness and for the teachings of Scripture that challenge us to be better people.

Accept these our humble prayers for your people, your Church, and one another.

O God our Redeemer, we pray for all people. We lift up to you those who suffer because of war, violence, abuse, and oppression. Be with the people of Ukraine and the Middle East. We pray for the innocent victims of these conflicts. We also lift up to you all those whose livelihoods are affected by the ongoing trade war that is developing between Canada and the United States. Lord, Christ also commanded us to pray for our enemies. In a world that is quick to judge and condemn, this is very hard for us to do. We pray for our enemies and that you would soften their hearts so that the hopeful work of reconciliation, peace, and justice may take place.

O God our Advocate, we pray for your Church. We live in a time when the Church is so divided and we judge other Christians. Forgive us for this sin, O God and by your Spirit bring us together. Unite us in service to the poor, the homeless, the sick, the prisoners, and the marginalized of our world. Be with Christians who are condemned for their faith.

O God our Strength, we pray for ourselves. Being a Christian is not easy and we seek your guidance as we follow your way. There are many challenging teachings for us to follow and we are so grateful that you never abandon us. In this season of Lent, send your Spirit to teach us how to love and forgive as you love and forgive us.

Heavenly Father, we pray for healing and comfort in the lives of your beloved children, who we name before you today...

Margaret, Haf, and their family
Sharon and her family

We thank you, O Lord, that you are constantly at work in our world. We thank you for the stories contained in the Gospels that continue to inspire and challenge us each and every day. May our words and our actions honour the teachings of Scripture. May the Church also honour your teachings so that the world will know Jesus as Lord. To you – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – be all honour and glory and praise. World without end. Amen.

Music: I know not why such wondrous grace (#683, all verses)

Blessing (Ephesians 4:1-6)

Sung Amen