

Judged

John 5:1-24

After this there was a festival of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ²Now in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate there is a pool, called in Hebrew Beth-zatha, which has five porticoes. ³In these lay many invalids—blind, lame, and paralyzed. ⁵One man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years. ⁶When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had been there a long time, he said to him, ‘Do you want to be made well?’ ⁷The sick man answered him, ‘Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; and while I am making my way, someone else steps down ahead of me.’ ⁸Jesus said to him, ‘Stand up, take your mat and walk.’ ⁹At once the man was made well, and he took up his mat and began to walk. Now that day was a sabbath. ¹⁰So the Jews said to the man who had been cured, ‘It is the sabbath; it is not lawful for you to carry your mat.’ ¹¹But he answered them, ‘The man who made me well said to me, “Take up your mat and walk.”’ ¹²They asked him, ‘Who is the man who said to you, “Take it up and walk”?’ ¹³Now the man who had been healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had disappeared in the crowd that was there. ¹⁴Later Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, ‘See, you have been made well! Do not sin any more, so that nothing worse happens to you.’ ¹⁵The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well. ¹⁶Therefore the Jews started persecuting Jesus, because he was doing such things on the sabbath. ¹⁷But Jesus answered them, ‘My Father is still working, and I also am working.’ ¹⁸For this reason the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because he was not only breaking the sabbath, but was also calling God his own Father, thereby making himself equal to God. ¹⁹Jesus said to them, ‘Very truly, I tell you, the Son can do nothing on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise. ²⁰The Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing; and he will show him greater works than these, so that you will be astonished. ²¹Indeed, just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whomsoever he wishes. ²²The Father judges no one but has given all judgement to the Son, ²³so that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. Anyone who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him. ²⁴Very truly, I tell you, anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life, and does not come under judgement but has passed from death to life.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

A few weeks ago, while driving down Highway 123, with Clemson in our sights, I noticed a church sign that I’ve never seen before. Now, the number of trips we take up and down 123 may not match those of the DuBose, Brasington, or Barker families, but we make the trip fairly regularly. So, I was surprised to see a new sign and this is what it said – “The God who loves also

judges.” At first, I was irritated by the sign. Why do we need to muddy God’s love with God’s judgment? “Of course,” I thought to myself, “it is one of those churches. Thank God our church will never have a sign like that.” But then I couldn’t get the sign out of my mind. So, its refrain has lived there for a few weeks and it has influenced my life. And it has influenced how I read the story that is before us today.

Judgement, being judged, feeling judged is a big deal in the high school world. Therefore, it is a big deal in my world as the Youth Pastor here at Westminster. And my refrain over the past few years has become, “I will never judge you.” “I will never judge you,” I tell my high schoolers. “I might worry about you and want the best for you and desire to help you make good decisions, but I will never judge you.” This is my refrain, because I know that’s what our youth need to hear. Because of all the things going on in their brains and bodies with development and hormones and growing into maturity mentally and physically, teenagers tend to be very sensitive to how others – both their peers and adults – see them and perceive them. Let me put it in a teenager’s words for you. The following was written by Cassie King, a teenage blogger for the Maddie Project. The Maddie Project is a community effort in support of youth struggling with depression and other mental health related concerns.

Imagine a world without any judgment. Everyone could do their own thing with something they are passionate about, without being judged. You could wear whatever you wanted, you could participate in your choice of hobby, you could eat however you wanted. You could have confidence everywhere you went and you could be certain you would hear nothing but positive thoughts coming your way. Now come back to reality. You can't even walk outside your front door without being judged, you can't even make a post without being judged. Being a teenager is incredibly hard to say the least, and for some, almost impossible.

On the surface, this passage isn’t about judgement. It is about a healing. In fact, it is the second healing in the gospel of John and the third of seven signs, or miracles, present in the first 11 chapters of this gospel. The word “judge” doesn’t show up in this passage until verse 22, but the idea of “judgement” permeates this story, doesn’t it?

- A crowd of disabled beggars lying at the entrance to the city.
- A healer questioning if a person truly wants to be made well.
- A sick man claiming he cannot get into the water.
- The mention of sin.
- Leaders who question the validity and timing of the healing.

Alexandra Brown, religion professor at Washington and Lee University says this, “judgment in John’s gospel is decidedly present and coincides with belief or unbelief.”

Up to this point in John’s gospel, we have had these powerful stories of belief.

- An abundance of wine miraculously appearing at a wedding reception in Cana where Jesus was in attendance.

- An eye-opening conversation under the cover of darkness between Jesus and the Pharisee Nicodemus.
- The Samaritan woman at the well and Jesus' in-depth knowledge of her life and the station of her heart.
- The healing of a royal official's son without even a hint of physical contact between that child and Jesus.

YES, these stories are about the miraculous deeds that Jesus does and the amazing words that he speaks and how these things lead people to belief, but they are also about judgment. About Jesus seeing the current station of someone's life or the world and deeming, NO, this is not good enough, this is not just. I'm going to bring it into alignment, into light, into wholeness, into abundance. The word that is translated as judgement in this passage is the Greek word, "krisin". It is related to the verb also used here, "krino". So, "krisin" = judgement. "Krino" = to judge.

But, as often happens when translating words from one language to another, some of the nuance can be lost. The word "krisin" captures a much broader understanding than just judgment. One faithful way to translate this term, one that I think fits this story perfectly is "an opinion or decision given, especially concerning justice and injustice, right and wrong." So, the judgement that comes with Jesus isn't just an arbitrary decision handed down by a learned scholar who knows the law to the "t", but a decision made from the heart, a decision that takes compassion into account, a decision that takes faith into account. A decision that says, "No, it is not right or good or just that a person has been suffering for 38 years."

Let's take a moment and imagine this scene playing out in our world, today. It might look like this:

A nice-looking couple and their good friends have gone downtown on a mild summer night for dinner and a show. They amble through a lovely park where children are playing freely and families with dogs enjoy walking along the edge of the river. As they amble slowly up Main Street toward the restaurant where they have reservations the couples encounter a small group of people who seem to be down on their luck and who are holding out cups to collect spare change. One has a sign that proclaims, "Disabled. Need Help." "Keep walking," the friends of the first couple mumble under their breath. But the first couple stops. You see, something has caught their eye. Both are health-care professionals, one works as a prosthetist at a highly rated hospital in their small city. And they have noticed that one of the people who is asking for money doesn't have a leg.

It looks like it has been amputated due to disease or injury. And there isn't a wheelchair in sight. The person is just sitting on a dirty, old quilt at the edge of the sidewalk. "Do you have a wheelchair?" the couple asks the person. "No," the person replies, "it is hard to keep a wheelchair while living on the streets. It is exposed to the elements and is hard to keep clean and working." "Well, what about a prosthetic and/or crutches?" the couple asks. "Only this one crutch that helps me get around downtown" the person says. "I can help you," replied the

prosthetist. “Here’s my card. If you meet me at my office tomorrow, I can get started in fitting you for a prosthetic leg.” “But, how much will it cost?” the person asks. “Nothing,” replies the couple, “We can pull some strings to get you a top of the line product at no cost to you.”

Later that evening as the couple and their friends are finishing up dinner, the friends begin to comment on the situation they encountered earlier. “I cannot believe you stopped to help that person. You don’t need to provide your services for free. There are such things as Medicare and Medicaid.” “Yes, but we can help,” the couple replies, “and so we will.” Across the way, a similar conversation ensues between the person the couple offered to help and her friends. “Why are you letting those people help you?” the friends ask. “I wouldn’t trust them as far as I could throw them.” “Well, they seemed kind, and they offered, so I am going to accept their help and see what happens. Maybe my luck is starting to turn around.”

Let’s be honest. Judgment isn’t just something that high schoolers struggle with. It is something we all struggle with and it permeates our lives. From the cars we drive, to the homes we live in, to the way we raise our children. We live our days powerfully aware of the ways others perceive us and come to conclusions based upon what they perceive. And sometimes this awareness can be debilitating and painful. Sometimes, it can control our lives. I think that’s why I reacted so viscerally to the sign I saw along highway 123. I already have people judging me, I don’t need a church to judge me. I don’t need God to judge me. I don’t need anymore judgement in my life.

But maybe I do. Maybe I need God’s judgment in my life because if this story tells us anything, it is that the judgment of God in Jesus Christ is different. It leads to healing, wholeness, and life everlasting. It is rooted in justice and goodness. It helps to bring the lives of God’s people into alignment. It takes away ailments that lingered for 38 years. It doesn’t always condone, but it never condemns a life. It pays no mind to excuses. It ignores the judgment of the world and relies on the truth.

If we take anything away from today, from this story, from this second of John’s seven signs, let it be this: *Very truly, I tell you, anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life, and does not come under judgement, but has passed from death to life.* – John 5:24

We are the people in verse 24. This is who God is calling us to be. Those who believe. And if we do, if we truly believe in the power of Jesus, in the love of God, then we need not fear Christ’s judgment. We need to welcome it, for it is not to condemn, but to give life. To bring life in all of its fullness. So maybe that church sign wasn’t bad...maybe it’s some of the best news I’ve ever seen.

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