

YOUR WORST FOOT FORWARD

Series: Attending to the mess
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Mess, Grace

*Oh our Lord,
You are so King
Oh our Lord,
You are so King*

*Morning to morning
Day to Day
You reveal Your righteousness*

*It's Your Kindness that leads to repentance
It's Your blood that brings forgiveness
It's Your mercy that brings us here
To Your throne of Grace*

*In your kindness we find repentance
In your blood we find forgiveness
In your mercy we find ourselves
At Your throne of grace, at Your throne of Grace*

Last week we started a conversation about the mess that brings us together. And if you were not able to join us you can always go back and listen online on our website or podcast. Some of the things I want us to go home with I will remind us as I start.

To begin with, we are all a mess, we have seen messes, we have made a mess of ourselves and we can see the mess around us. And maybe if we can see the mess around us, this is the lens through which we can see God. Because every time we say that we and others are not perfect we are saying that there is a perfect that we are not. Every time we say there is a mess we are saying that there is an unless.

And one would think that God would be so angry and be repelled by us. Instead, when God sees the mess we are, he was moved by compassion so much compassion that he sent Jesus, that he moved closer. The most famous verse in the Bible says that:

John 3:16

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only son that whoever believes in him should not die but live forever”

For God so loved the messy you and the messy me, that he moved closer. I might paraphrase. And my invitation was to believe that God would respond in compassion to you and the world around us.

And maybe you walked with me for a while and you said, hold up what about me I have made the most irreversible mess. I could never clean this up on my own. My mess is too big. And I am not talking about you siphoning Internet off of your neighbour without his permission mess. Or you did not leave a tip at the coffee shop mess. Or you lost your temper at the clerk at the government office.

I mean those are serious messes but I am talking to those who think they have made a very big mess of themselves and it seems unfixable or at least not something they can fix on their own. You have made such a big mess that you are thinking of leaving town to a place no one knows you and some even considering suicide because they feel unforgivable. You just cannot face yourself anymore, you cannot stand the sound of your won thoughts when that issue comes up when your soul starts to speak.

Or maybe you are the kind of person who remembers the day your eyes opened wide at the sight of Grace. Your heart leapt for joy at the sound of the waves of forgiveness when you first put your trust in Jesus but now you feel like you have lost your way because of the mess you have made. You are not sure if you can come back a second time or if you have been kicked off the team already. You are not sure if the last mess you made was the last strike for you.

You see, the other part of the most famous verse in the Bible does get much play. Actually, so many people are unaware that verses were added to the letters and writings we call the Bible much later. The idea was to make it easy to read and make reference but as with everything we create they can have benefits and side effects too. And some of the bad impact verses have had is the continuous flow of what was being communicated is sometimes lost.

Let us read a bit further past the most famous verse

For God so loved the world that he gave his only son so that anyone who believes in him would not die but have real life, everlasting life.

For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

Jesus did not come into the world to condemn the world. To point a finger at people and tell them, "look at how you messed up your life on drugs, look at the mess you have made of your marriage, look at the financial mess you are, look at what a liar you are, look at all the people you have hurt, look at what a mess you have made of your sexuality."

Jesus did not come to condemn the world instead he came so that through him we all can be saved. So that if we trust him, if we lead our lives as he is inviting us to if we surrender to him the mess would be healed.

Salvation is such a big concept and sometimes we minimize it to saying a prayer and waiting for our souls to go to heaven when we die. And that is why for some traditions saying a very

particular prayer called the sinner's prayer and remembering exactly when you said is the most important thing in life.

So it is bad news for people in this crowd who like me said this prayer almost every other Sunday when they were young. There was just this obsession with when you got saved.

But you see salvation is not limited to declaring through a 'prayer' or otherwise that you have put your faith in Jesus, it is bigger than that. It is healing for our souls and our bodies.

Right before taking this job, my eyesight had grown worse and years before my doctors had said that I might need surgery if it grows worse. Went for a checkup and a doctor confirmed that it had really grown worse.

So I took some days off to go to Nairobi where my doctor was and paid for further tests. Guess what? Just in those few hours, the condition of my eyes had been rest four years back. I mean I still need glasses but I did not a surgery I did not need a change of glasses either.

That is salvation. Salvation also means healing. Salvation covers our finances as well as the environment and the redemption of our political system.

So God loves the messy us, he moves closer through Jesus the un-mess. Not so that he can point a finger at us and remind us of the mess we have made but so that in his compassion we can have real whole life.

Real life is not just about when we die and see him face to face, it starts here and now. It is this compassion that marked the life of Jesus in all his encounters with people. Even those how had made a very big mess of themselves.

People who some of you might identify with. They had made such big messes that they could not clean up on their own or. Before you leave town before you drink yourself to numbness before you walk out of that marriage before you silence and ignore your soul hear some of this.

One day Jesus was walking surrounded by large crowds trying to touch him and have a glimpse of him and hear him speak. The crowd was too big that a certain short man stood no chance. It was going to be a tall order for him to see Jesus so he climbs on a tree.

Now, this guy had made a big mess of himself. He had worked with the government that was oppressing his people so he was considered a turncoat, a traitor. If that was not enough, he had robbed people for their money by charging more. Listen, no one liked this guy. He probably needed bodyguards just to move around in the community.

But Jesus sees him on the tree and he stops, calls him by name and says that he must eat at his house. Did Jesus know the kind man this was? How dare a rabbi claiming to be the son of God go to the house of such a sinner, such a messy man.

While they dined with Jesus Zaccheaus the short man is moved by Jesus' compassion towards him despite the mess he had made. He promises to pay back everything he had stolen from people and he pays with interest that is above what the law required.

Jesus said this about that day, "Surely salvation has come to this house" There is that word salvation again. Not about when he dies but right there he started living real life.

Then there is a time when angry men, filled with self-righteousness heard that in the neighbourhood there was a man and a woman committing adultery - the thing with small towns is that everybody knows everybody's business.

They gathered a crowd and went there. Caught the two in the act. But they ignored the man and dragged the lady to Jesus. Embarrassing her. Maybe they would beat her as they walked, insult her, call her names no woman should ever be called.

We all have seen how mobs behave, we have been part of one. And in the age of social media, we can be part of a mob without showing our faces.

And on the way she is just thinking what a mess she has made of herself. If she was married she had not only destroyed her marriage but that of another woman too. She had brought disgrace on her family and herself.

She is probably thinking that if she gets out of this alive, she will leave town, she will commit suicide, she will drink herself to oblivion. She knows there is no way she could undo the mess she has made. Forever she will be called the adulterous woman.

They get to Jesus and she is thrust to the ground and they say, "We are required to stone her, what do you say?" And Jesus, in character, is moved by compassion and speaks in wisdom and says, "If anyone has not sinned they should throw the first stone at her." If anyone is not a mess, they can be the first one.

The older ones who had lived life long enough are to remember when they were unfaithful, when they had committed a similar crime, to remember that they too are a mess dropped their stones and walked away.

There were younger ones, more stubborn and proud who thought they were perfect and that the worst they had done was to walk out of their teacher in the school. But adultery, that was unforgivable in their mind.

They were the last but they too leave. Some of them must have seen their own mess. Some looked at the older men they respited leaving and realized it is only wise for them too to leave.

And sometimes we are caught in this very scenario. How fast your heart is changed from judgment to mercy towards those who you think have crossed the line says a lot about your maturity in Jesus.

But today the focus is on this woman. She is waiting for the first stone to drop after all she is already beating herself up. Then she hears the voice of Jesus saying to her, “Woman, where are they that condemn you?”

He did not call her you adulterer. He called her, woman. Same word he used when talking to his mother. Seems like Jesus did not see her through the mess but she saw her. Jesus is not calling you a drunk or an addict or this or that. He is calling you by your name. Your mess does not define you to God.

One day Jesus was arrested and he was sentenced to death on the cross. His death was unique but this kind of murder by the Romans was not. So he was not alone on the crosses outside the city that day.

There were two men so notorious that the best thing they could imagine doing with him was put him to death. He had made a mess of himself and his reputation that no one trusted him to even give him a prison sentence.

And one would think that it would be too late for him. He was already dying. There was no more use for his life. But he turned his head in pain towards Jesus and begged for mercy. Jesus turned to him and promised him eternal life that very day. Imagine, a thief at his death got to get to heaven before any of the heroes of faith we know about.

It is not too late for you either. What Jesus did for all these people he can do for you today.

Last week I introduced a guy by the name Paul. He was a bright guy with good connections who committed his life to arrest and even seeing to the murder of the followers of Jesus. He meets Jesus and Jesus has compassion on him.

Paul amazed at this kind of Grace becomes one of the leaders of this movement called “The Way”. He begins to plant churches throughout their known world and writes letters to these churches and their leaders to encourage them.

Here is a portion from a letter he was writing to a young pastor called Timothy

Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst.

What stands out for me today is the present tense of that statement. He is not saying he was the worst of sinners, he said he is the worst of sinners. Years after Paul has started following Jesus and is even a big leader in the movement he wakes up and has this realization in his soul that he is still a mess and in his measure a bigger mess than some people he has come across. Yet he continuous

But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would

believe in him and receive eternal life. Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honour and glory forever and ever. Amen.

God is patient with him. That God is still showing him mercy so that it can be evidence to everyone else that God is and can be patient with them

What God did for Paul he can do for you today. And sometimes it is really hard because you are a leader like Paul, You should act better. You're the father or the mother. You are the only follower of Jesus in the family. All eyes are on you and how dare you still show that you are a mess.

You can put your worst foot forward. Struggling with your sexuality? Of course, you can come to church. Struggling with tribal bias? Whether that is racial, political or any other ethnic tribal bias, you can come to Jesus, you can come to Trinity Vineyard.

Does how we live our lives matter? Yes. But it has to start with the good news of Jesus, that he has paid it all and nothing could separate you from him. And I have heard people say, "Don't say that, people will use that as permission to sleep around, as permission drink way too much, as permission to be this and that" and that is just not true.

The reality that God is calling and by His spirit and wisdom empowering us to be more, to overcome sin is not any less true from the reality that forgiveness has been given freely and completely.

God is still in the business of showing compassion to the worst of us. But that is easy when I need compassion and mercy and forgiveness. Mercy for me but not for you. We all find it easy to "but those people, but that woman, but that church. And we have the Bible to back it with. Just like the men wanting to stone that woman had scripture to back their craving for blood. Paul had scripture to back his rampage.

So we say things like, "Yeah I know we are all sinners but surely people of this sexual preference?" Yeah I know we are all sinners but surely people of that political party have gone too far.

But when we see what a mess we truly are and we see God's mercy on us, we are disarmed and rocks fall off our hands. We finally realize that it is God's Kindness that leads us to repentance and it is his blood that brings forgiveness.

What God did for Paul he will do for you, and your neighbour: For This country and for Somalia and Sudan. The good news is for the whole world.

Let's Pray