



LESSONS for LIFE

MARCH 22, 2009 11:00 a.m.
8 Life Changing Messages from Jesus
FROM JUDGMENT TO FORGIVENESS
Rev. Dr. Brent Hawkes, C.M.

SACRED READINGS

Lesson: MATTHEW 7: 1 - 5

Gospel: JOHN 8: 3 - 7

I want you to indulge me a little bit during this sermon. First I want you to travel with me to a fantasy land. The land is called EM and it's spelled EM; and in this fantasy land of Em all of us have exactly the same profession, exactly the same job. We are all trained to be judges. Now some of us may come from England and have fancy wigs that we wear as judges; others may wish that they came from England to be able to wear the fancy wigs! But all of us are in the position of being judges. In this land of EM you are in your role of judge every hour of the day that you're awake and you constantly have to make decisions. Is something red or is it blue? When you meet people you place a red or a blue dot on them. When you see an object nearby you place a red or a blue dot. When you think back to your past, of incidents that happened in your life, you place a red or blue dot. When you think about what's happening tomorrow, the next day, you place a red or a blue dot; all of the hours that you are awake. This morning I'm going to ask you to do an exercise. When you came in you were given a little piece of paper that has two blue dots on it and a little piece of paper that has two red dots on it; you're going to need those now. You were also given one with some white dots on it and you're going to hold on to those for a few moments. In a few minutes I'm going to give you an exercise that will take you 15 seconds, but you're going to have to move fast. Now I promise you, no one will take your spot in the pew! When you come back it will be there for you, okay? What I want you to do is to take the two blue dots and the two red dots and I want you to place them somewhere and at least two of them I want you to place on people, so when you look around you'll think, "Oh, that's a red person, or that's a blue person." I'm not going to tell you what they mean, you have to decide that for yourself. And you can place some on objects nearby but I have a little extra exercise for you to do when you're doing that. Each time you place a dot I want you to say, "Ouch!" So, ready? Go. I want you to place the dots now, please. (Congregants get busy placing dots on people, objects, etc. amidst much laughter).

Order, said Brent, as he banged a gavel on the lectern. "Order in the land of EM." Every moment of your waking day: Is it a red or is it a blue? Every moment of thinking of past events – is it a red or a blue? Every moment of thinking into the future, is it a red or a blue? And as you look around the room you're going to see some red and blue all over the place. How many of you placed a dot on yourself? (no one) I'll return to that in a moment. I'd like you now to resign your position as judge. *Judge not lest you be judged*, Jesus said. I'd like you to step down from your position, turn in your gavel and I'd like you now to get your dots back. Go and find them and retrieve them. (congregants again got up and retrieved their respective dots).

Thank you. Now some of you weren't able to get all of your dots back. It's a true thing that sometimes in our lives when we make judgments of other people it ends up hurting someone else. Sometimes we would like to take those judgments back and we are unable to do so. Sometimes we



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get more information and we realize the judgment was wrong. Sometimes additional things happen later on that proves our initial assessment was not correct. Some of those judgments can't be taken back. Now when you were labeling something red or blue in some cases you didn't have enough information to know whether there was a red or a blue but you felt you had to follow the orders and you had to make a judgment. Sometimes you placed a dot on someone and you noticed that your blue dot was joining with a red dot. Some of us had labeled things very very differently, based on the information we had or thought we had. So we're going to leave the land of EM right now and we're going to take the two letters that spell the land of EM, e and me and we're going to reverse them and so we're now moving into the land of ME. You're now moving into your own space, your own land, and in that fantasy land you did not label yourself – no one did – but in the real world we label ourselves all the time. We make a mistake and we label ourselves; we say something that's stupid and we label ourselves. Someone else might turn down a request for a dance and we label ourselves. We judge ourselves all the time.

Now in the land of EM you had the role of judge, but in the land of ME you no longer have that role. You have resigned your position as judge and yet we act like a judge all the time. We are told that we're constantly thinking in our minds and when we see situations, when we see individuals, when we see an event, or action, we then judge the item, the event or the action; and in most of those cases there is absolutely no need for us to judge. We're not in a responsible position, we don't have enough information and frankly it's none of our business. Most of the time when we label we label negatively and we leave the label on, even if someone makes a mistake we will label them by that mistake and leave that dot on them for ever, taking away all the other things about that individual, all that might be good there because we're going to leave that label on their forehead – or if we take it off maybe the next time we see them we'll remember and we'll re-label them and re-label them and every time we do that we 'ouch' ourselves. Every time we do that we re-live the incident. They may have hurt us once but our re-labeling hurts ourselves. We hurt ourselves' we 'ouch' ourselves again and again and again. And most of the time we get the labels wrong. Most of the time when an event happens in our lives we initially respond – and we label it – but we leave the label on and we then prevent ourselves moving past that initial assessment and we stay in that place of judgment and it paralyzes us and prevents us from growing.. Now sometimes that initial incident may be awful. It may be clearly red or clearly blue but by leaving the label on it we prevent ourselves from growing past it. Now some of you grew up in the land of EM; some of you grew up with judges all around you even in your family. You no longer live in the land of EM. They no longer have the position of judge; that has been left behind. They do not have that authority. Labeling makes a mess. Sometimes we need to make judgments. Sometimes we look at things and make a decision. Is this a red or a blue? Is this good for me? Sometimes we need to take a look at ourselves and see the patterns of our lives and we need to label them and we need to change them. Sometimes you're in a position of authority at work and you have to make a judgment. When you're hiring someone you have to look at their credentials, their attitude and their history and you have to make a judgment call. Red or blue.

The scripture says to us we're not to judge. That's the place we start from. If there's no need to make a judgment don't make a judgment. Stop labeling but if you are in a position, or if there is an occasion to make a judgment the scripture says *the way you judge you will be judged. Be careful how you judge. Don't judge by the way someone looks. Don't judge by a person's race or age or levels of ability. Don't judge because someone has even labeled themselves a certain way.* The way you judge will come back to you. Jesus said, *When you're looking at that speck in someone else's*



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eye remember that you have a log in your own to take care of. Don't judge the other person. Do your own work. We are to move away from judgments and we are to move towards forgiveness. Forgiveness is the gift you give to yourself; forgiveness that says someone else is much more than that initial label. Forgiveness says I will move past that labeling them for the incident and I will see them as much more than that label. Forgiveness says I will let go of and I will not 'ouch' myself any more. I will move past that incident. Jesus said, *Love your enemies. Don't keep labeling them as the bad person.* Jesus said, *Bless those that curse you, even though they're still at it:* not to judge and not to label.

You may lose a job and you initially label it a bad thing; it's going to move your life upside down; it's going to throw your finances out of whack. Your partner may be angry with you – initially labeling it, but if you leave that label on the incident it will paralyze you in terms of the good that now can be done and if you take that label off and instead of you say, "It is what it is," there are lessons to be learned, yes, there are actions you now need to take, yes, but only time will tell whether it's a red or a blue. Only time will tell whether it works out, whether it works out to your ultimate good or not. Take off the label. This week I did something that I initially thought was a good thing to do. I made a suggestion in a group situation instead of making that suggestion through the team leader. I made the suggestion, thought it was a good suggestion, looked at the person's body language and thought, uh oh – they are upset at me! I labeled that and I fretted all evening long! I ouch and ouch and ouch myself. The next day my phone light was flashing. There was a message. I picked up the message and the person said, "Brent, thank you for staying later last night and for making that suggestion. I had labeled it wrong and I had ouch myself when it wasn't even necessary – a common pattern.

Pre-judging events – uh oh – labeling it. In the gospel reading a woman was caught in adultery. They brought her to Jesus to test him. They kind of knew what he was going to do. Jesus said, *Let those of you who are without sin cast the first stone. There is no need to judge her and if you are sinless, cast the first stone.* If you read further in that gospel reading you will read that they went away one by one.

The choir sang about Daniel in the lion's den and in that song it says that God sealed the mouth of the lion and Daniel got off easy. Many of us, by the judgments we make, put ourselves in the lion's den and God does not let us off that easily. God says, if you're going to make that judgment and you're going to walk into that lion's den you get yourself out of the lion's den this time. Often times when we make judgments we then expect God to rescue us and sometimes we have to face the consequences of our bad judgments. Now when you came in this morning you also got four white dots. You needn't take them out. These are to take home with you and I would like you to use these white dots so that when something happens this week and you're tempted to label it – you're tempted to make a judgment about it – instead of judging it red or blue, good or bad, I would like you to put a white dot on it and be reminded that only time will tell whether this turns red or blue; only time will tell what this action is. For now it is what it is – without judgment. When you are tempted to judge another person by an incident take out a white dot, look at it, place it on your mirror; remind yourself not to judge. Only time will tell. The person is much more than the red or the blue dot that you would place on them.

You know, we've left the land of EM and we've moved into the land of ME and we need to look at the log that may be in your own eye. Look at the patterns in your own life that you may need to change.



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Spend time looking here instead of judging there. If we're able to do a good job of this we'll not only be able to leave the land of EM behind us but we will also be able to transition from the land of ME. Close your eyes and see the word ME printed in front of you. Turn the letters upside down and you've moved from the land of ME to the land of WE. If we will stop judging each other, if we will stop making judgments about the past or the future then we will be able to create the kind of world where we move from judgment to forgiveness, the kind of world where WE is lived, the kind of world that Jesus intended all along.

Amen.