

## Lenten Sermon: Bishop Justin Duckworth, 1<sup>st</sup> week of Lent 2019

- 00:01 Kia ora friends, welcome to our Lenten study series. I'm really excited about our topic this year and that's the topic of grace. I don't know about you but when I look back over my life: yes I do have some regrets, yes, the bishop does have some regrets. And when I look at the situations in my life where I have regrets, normally there's a common theme, and the theme is that somewhere around the place
- 00:27 something went wrong, but then my response to that situation as opposed to making this situation better actually escalated that situation. And then often what happens is somebody else comes back and it escalates, and before I know it I'm actually living in a complete nightmare. And we see this right through our lives:
- 00:49 this kind of tit-for-tat cycle where because I've been hurt therefore I'm going to get somebody back and because they've been hurt they're going to get somebody back and we see it in our families - and of course we'd never see it in the Anglican Church but we might see it in other denominations! But we see the cycle and we see it playing out globally where - because a country or a people group has been hurt and therefore they come back responding out of hurt, but as opposed to making the situation better it actually amplifies the situation and escalates.
- 01:23 And we had this tit-for-tat cycle of violence. And that's why I think this Lenten study series is so important because in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, we have an alternative to that cycle that basically has cursed us through our human existence. In the life of Jesus,
- 01:41 we have this wonderful moment where on the way to the cross He says "forgive them for they know not what they do." It's an incredibly powerful moment on the way to the cross where Jesus... If anybody in all of creation has a right to be upset because He has been wrongfully tried, wrongfully sentenced to death, wrongfully tortured - if anybody has a right to be indignant about their treatment, Jesus does. If anybody can keep score of somebody having wronged somebody, Jesus has the right; but on the way to the cross He says "forgive them for they know not what they do." And at that moment, what he does is He says that there will be no revenge, that yes, I am innocent and yes, I am being tortured and yes, I am being crucified but let nobody - let nobody take this situation and escalate it. Instead,
- 02:40 let us resolve it. And let us resolve it in a way that brings harmony and peace and restores our world. And so in the life and death of Jesus we see this profound grace - this profound grace that Jesus lives out through His ministry. And this first reading in our Lenten studies we go to this story of this woman caught in adultery. Now it's really clear: nowhere in the story does it say she wasn't caught in adultery, yes, she had broken the law, yes, she had done wrong, but it's very interesting the response of Jesus.

- 03:20 So it says the Pharisees and the religious leaders take this woman who's been caught in adultery and they take her to Jesus. Now, what is fascinating though, it says the Pharisees and religious leaders were looking to trick Jesus. They didn't care about the woman caught in adultery and the wrong she had done, they were just using this issue of injustice or perceived injustice. They were just using it to get to Jesus.
- 03:50 It's really interesting. I mean I don't know about you but the amount of situations I've been in, where we use a situation to really push our own cause. Nothing to do the situation but just to push our own cause. So this is the situation we have at the moment, this woman is caught in adultery and is being taken by the Pharisees and the religious rulers to Jesus in order for it to trap Jesus.
- 04:16 Now obviously it's a game to the Pharisees. For this woman, it's her life! And we won't even talk about the fact that... where was the guy?! Obviously he got away and nobody cares about him. We won't even talk about that. But then this woman comes to Jesus and it says there was a crowd gathering around. And imagine this woman in her shame but in her fear.
- 04:48 And she knows she's being played, she knows that her life is being played out before her by the powerful men of society. But it's really beautiful what Jesus does. In the scripture it says that Jesus bent down and he drew, he wrote in the ground. Why'd he do that? My deep belief is this:
- 05:15 He did that to draw the attention away from the woman; so that suddenly everybody's eyes are on what Jesus is doing. What's he writing, what's he drawing. And suddenly the eyes are off the woman, and it's just a beautiful moment where Jesus in that moment of hostility, that moment of shame, Jesus again role models taking that into Himself.
- 05:38 And then He says those profound words: "let him who is without sin cast the first stone." And it's interesting, it said the older ones, the older men left first. Maybe there's some wisdom with age there, where actually as we get older we kind of realise that actually, in our youth we may have been idealistic, but as we got older we actually realise we're not perfect and actually we ourselves have done many many things that we are ashamed of.
- 06:14 And nobody picked up a stone. The Pharisees and the religious leaders, they didn't even pick up stones. And in this wonderful moment where judgment was called for, Jesus showed mercy and grace. And Jesus lived out this mercy and grace. And we see this right through Scripture, this beautiful ability to take justice and take wrong-giving but as opposed to escalating it,
- 06:49 this ability of Jesus to actually diminish it and cause restoration and harmony. We think of the Beatitudes where it says "Blessed are the merciful for they shall be shown mercy." If we are merciful, then we will be shown mercy. We think of... in James, Chapter 2, where it says that if you're not merciful, then you will receive judgment. But it says mercy triumphs over judgment. This wonderful mercy of God triumphs over judgment.

- 07:24 And then we think of this story in Scripture where Jesus tells the parable of the person who had a huge debt forgiven. And then they had a creditor too, and they wouldn't forgive them that little debt and instead locked them up for their little debt. And Jesus has huge judgment on them that they would not forgive the debt even though they themselves had been forgiven. And for me,
- 07:52 it's so beautifully apparent that as an Anglican, just about every day we pray the Lord's Prayer together. And that line that says "forgive my sins as I forgive those who sin against me." How do we pray that prayer and not forgive those around us? The basis of the Lord's Prayer is this idea that I am forgiven as I forgive others; I give mercy to others,
- 08:19 and therefore I receive mercy in doing that. And this is this radical picture of grace that Jesus looked at. And this is the hallmark of followers of Jesus. Followers of Jesus decide not to seek vengeance. Not to seek judgment but instead to seek mercy. Now just imagine if you will if our churches were known for that.
- 08:45 Just imagine if we weren't known for bitter politics, back-stabbing, people defending their own rights, people relitigating 20 years of hurt in the Church - but instead were known as this community of radical forgiveness, radical grace, radical mercy. It's interesting,
- 09:11 I think one of the most compelling images I've thought on in the last few years is this... is that so often I go through our society and I'm talking to young people or talking to older people... but what I realised is that so many people have this strange picture of God. They have this picture of God as a wrathful and a punitive God, and that the very nature and character of God is one to want to punish us. And we know, though, that when Jesus came to earth - it says that if you've seen Jesus, you've seen God.
- 09:49 That Jesus came to Earth - partly why He came to Earth was to reveal to us what is the very nature of God. Is this wrathful, punitive God, this God who cannot wait to catch you out for your misgivings and your misdemeanours; is that the picture of God? There's this beautiful part, as Jesus is being crucified, which talks about what happened when He was crucified.
- 10:16 It talks about that as He was dying on the cross, the veil in the Temple was torn in two. What does that mean? Well we know that the veil in the temple was there to separate people from God's holiness. God was thought to dwell in the most... inner-most places of the Temple and once a year, or so the story goes,
- 10:39 a high priest would be allowed to go in there, and they tie a rope to the high priest just in case they fainted in the presence of God, and they'd go in there and they would be face to face with God's presence. And so God's very nature and presence was thought to dwell within the Temple. So here we have Jesus dying on the cross and as He dies it says the veil is torn in two. The way I look at it,
- 11:06 it's a bit like on-stage, the curtain now is drawn back - and as the veil is torn in two, we suddenly get a look at who was God, really. Who is God really? What is the ultimate image of God, what is the image of God that should define our lives? God is vulnerable, and tortured, and dying on a cross because of His great love to us and refuses -

- 11:38 refuses - to take vengeance. But instead He says “forgive them for they know not what they do.” That is the ultimate picture of God that is expressed in the life of Jesus most purely at that moment. The curtain falls away. And we see God for who God most wants to be known as. And that God is a God of mercy, of grace.
- 12:03 And I don't know about you, but I just so fall in love with that God. I so fall in love with a God who knows who I am, who knows all my debacles in life. But then chooses to come in grace and chooses to come in mercy, and accepts me as I am. And you know what: when I fall in love with that God of mercy and grace, my question is how do I treat the person next to me?
- 12:32 Now, here's my great wish for my life. When I come to die, I want to look back on my life and I want to know that I have not added to the cycle of hate and violence in our world, and in our church. Instead I wanted to have diminished it. I wanted to live a life to the best of my ability following my Saviour, and my Lord, and my friend; and I want to live a life where - as opposed to tit for tat -
- 13:01 Instead, I choose to soak up - soak up the pain, soak up the hatred, soak up the bitterness, so that those around me can find wholeness and healing in their lives. And for me that is the beautiful picture that God calls us to in this season of Lent as we investigate grace, as we study grace, may that grace change our lives. May we do church differently.
- 13:27 May we do church differently as we realize the Christ who we serve, the God who we serve, is not primarily wrathful or punitive but a naked, tortured, dying God who loves us so much that He'll die for us and utters the word “forgive them for they don't know what they are doing.” Can I invite you on this Lenten journey. Can I invite you to live in that grace.
- 13:56 Can I invite you to reflect in your life where, as opposed that you respond tit-for-tat - somebody has hurt me and my family - somebody has hurt me in my church – somebody has hurt me in society - as opposed to responding that way with like for like, instead pray God forgive them. Forgive them for they know not what they do. And may you experience in that forgiveness the forgiveness that God has promised you and may you experience the mercy that God has promised you as well.
- 14:27 Blessed are the merciful for they shall experience mercy. Let me pray. Loving God we are so thankful. For the picture that you have shown us in the life death and resurrection of Jesus. May we orientate our lives around this radical grace. Lord may we be that people. Help us where we've slipped into being religious leaders or Pharisees.
- 14:57 But may we be the people of radical grace. Lord forgive us where we've held on to injustice in our own lives. Forgive us where we've held onto bitterness, that we may walk lightly forward and we may be a blessing to all people in Your mighty name. Amen.