

KITCHEN COUNTER MUSING

From Pastor Mark for Friday, July 25, 2025

ON JUDGEMENT

Every day I meet people in the hospital whose stories stick in my head. Some are joyful. Many are not. The following is one such “not” story.

John was hard to connect with. He didn’t have much to say until I said, “John, you’re 86, I’m 62. What advice would you give me for living the next 25 years?” He said, “Well, when I was 52 the judge said, I had two choices: go to jail or go to AA. I had always been a mean drunk.”

I had opened the door, and John walked through. He told me the following story.

John married early and had six kids before he was 30. But he was rarely home, and rarely faithful. He had taken up with a wealthy, older woman and, somehow, his wife knew about the two of them. One night he took his wife to dinner at a restaurant where this woman happened to be. John said he didn’t know his mistress would be there. The two women confronted each other and his wife asked the woman if she wanted John. The woman said, “yes,” and John’s wife said, “you can have him,” and ran out of the restaurant. She ran through the parking lot and jumped over a rock wall separating the restaurant from a closed auto dealership. She had thought the ground would be level on the other side, but it dropped off ten feet.

She fell to her death.

John said, shortly after his wife’s death, he and his older mistress moved into a house on the Cape, and the kids he didn’t have a relationship with moved in with them. That is, they moved in with their father’s lover who was, at least indirectly, responsible for their mother’s death.

This was shocking but John then said he hired a nanny to take care of the children. Of course, over time, John took up with the nanny. He dumped the older woman and married the nanny who the children had come to love. John says he didn’t stop drinking and he stayed with the nanny for about 15 years. Then he started up with another woman and divorced the nanny/wife. The kids chose to stay close to their “stepmom” until she died a few years later of cancer.

Until recently, John hadn’t seen any of his kids for almost thirty years. When he was diagnosed with chronic COPD, and placed under hospice care, he reached out to them. Three of the six agreed to meet with him. He said the meeting didn’t go all that well.

Upon finishing the story, he sat there shaking his head. Finally, he spoke: “What a waste of life.”

John wasn’t seeking forgiveness, at least I didn’t get the impression that he was in search of forgiveness. Instead, he seemed to recognize in his dying days how poor his collection of choices had been over his lifetime. I heard John passing judgment on himself.

John died alone. I believe I was the only non-medical person in his room in the last week of his life. He's told me before he died that he wonders about judgment from heaven. But I think John has already had his judgment.

Would some eternal judgment from God be "just," or just piling on at this point?

But, equally, what would forgiveness look like? What is forgiveness in light of all the damage John created throughout his life with his selfish choices? I don't really know.

I told this story to one of the social workers at the hospital who said, "Wow, I didn't know all that about John but, you know, I can't still help but to like him."

I guess I hope that's what happens to all of us at judgment time: despite everything, God likes us anyway.

Grace and Peace,
Mark