

Copyright Geist Christian Church, May 5, 2024

Series Title: Keeping it Real: The Power of Vulnerability

Sermon Title: The Values Gap

Preaching: Danny Gulden, Lead Pastor, Promise Road Campus

Text: [John 8:1-11](#)

Email: [Danny Gulden](#)

[Watch Service](#)



This is the fourth week in our latest series, *Keeping it Real: The Power of Vulnerability*. For years, vulnerability was thought of as a weakness. Many consider vulnerability a strength and the key to unlocking our authentic selves. Authenticity is hard but leads to some of the best experiences in life. We will explore what the Bible says about vulnerability and the power that comes from being real.

As we approach the home stretch, I invite you to join us for the final installment of our series next week, when we will bring our journey on vulnerability and authenticity to a close.

This week, I want to talk about the values gap. My first job as a teenager was as a train conductor on the train that rode around the base of Stone Mountain in Georgia. I had to wear red suspenders and a goofy hat. My job was to help people on and off the train and ensure no one went outside the train car while the train was moving. At the station, when people got on and off, there was a stair we would move in place to help people on and off the train's steps.

No matter how well positioned the stairs were, there was always a gap between the bottom of the train's steps and this stair. Our supervisor would say over and over to the teen workforce "Mind the gap."

You may have heard this phrase before—"Mind the Gap." In life, the gap is between where we stand and where we want to go. If we are speaking of values, *the gap we must watch is what we say we are going to do or who we say we are going to be and what we actually do and how we act toward others*. Charles Kelly calls these aspirational values and practiced values.

A quick example of what a gap looks like: Let's say your family's aspirational values are gratitude and respect.

Mom and Dad always feel unappreciated.
They are tired of their children's disrespectful attitudes.
However, Mom, and Dad often yell at one another and call each other names.
No one in the house says please or thank you, including the parents.
Moreover, Mom and Dad use put-downs with their children and one another, and each family member routinely teases other family members to the point of tears.
The parents ask their children to model behavior that the children have not seen before.
So, although they aspire to for gratitude and respect, that is certainly not what is practiced

We have to align values with actions. It's not enough to say we value something but not live it out. There is vulnerability in identifying gaps in our values and how they align with our actions. We have to do work, look in the mirror, ask tough questions, and stretch our minds and spirits—all vulnerable actions—to align our actions with our values. This kind of vulnerability is uncomfortable, but it is necessary.

The way we often see it play out in religious communities is that we say, "We welcome all"—most churches say this. One day as I sat in my office, I had a person who told me this experience: An LGBTQ person went to the new-member class and learned they couldn't serve in that church or be a part of any studies or groups. For any church that wants to say we welcome all, that is a values gap. *A religious community must be who they say they are and who God calls them to be.*

There is vulnerability in admitting that you have a gap in your aspirational values and your practiced values. We all have it. It is vulnerable to admit that we have work to do.

One way to look at discipleship is this: Discipleship is minding the gap and closing the gap between our practiced values and our aspirational values.

We are going to lean into one of my favorite texts in the Bible. It is about a group of religious leaders who are challenging Jesus' values, forcing Jesus to put himself out there. These are hardliners, if you will. They bring to Jesus, while he is teaching in the temple, a woman caught in the act of adultery:

The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery, and, making her stand before all of them, ⁴they said to him, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. ⁵Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" ⁶They said this to test him, so that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. (John 8:3-6)

It's curious that Jesus is being confronted and he writes on the ground with his finger. There has been a lot of ink spilled trying to figure out what Jesus wrote. But my favorite thought, and the one I lean into, is that he writes nothing. He scribbles. It's chicken scratch. It's Jesus' way of giving them the silent treatment.

When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." ⁸ And once again he bent down and wrote on the ground. ⁹ When they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the elders, and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. ¹⁰ Jesus straightened up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" ¹¹ She said, "No one, sir." And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again." (John 8:7-11)

I love this. One thing you should know about capital punishment in Jesus' day is that it was deeply personal. If you accused someone of something and they were found guilty, it was you who would stone them to death. It's a personal value question when Jesus says, who will throw the stone?

Are you so sure that you are right? Are you certain that your values align with God's values? Well, there is a gap between their and God's values as they shuffle off one by one.

Jesus is challenging their values.

Jesus is challenging the values of the system.

Jesus is replacing the value of condemnation and dehumanization with the value of grace.

How many of the world's issues are caused because we become self-righteous and believe we have it all figured out? That we hold the divine correctness in all things?

There are a lot of people who claim to speak on the values of God when those values have very little to do with God's values. It is a vulnerable act to admit we don't have it figured out. It is vulnerable to admit that we may be wrong. It is vulnerable to look in the mirror and ask ourselves and God what we need to move closer to God's will for our lives and the world.

I'd like to think that Jesus moved the religious leaders of the day closer to God's heart in this encounter. I pray that he moves each of us closer to the heart of God. I challenge each of us to pay attention to the movement of God's spirit in our hearts.

For the religious leaders, he points out their values gap by inviting them to throw the first stone. If this is what you really want to practice, here you go. I believe he sends them away, released from the bondage of judgment and dehumanization, into the freedom given by a grace-filled and welcoming God.

We are given the gift of space to be vulnerable, to examine our values, to see if they align with the God who loves us so.

Let us pray.