

Children's sermon (choose)

(I need) to begin by saying not all ancient manuscripts of John's Gospel contain this story. There are two possible reasons. One is that in some manuscripts of Luke's Gospel a form of the story is recorded; but the second is more intriguing. Some scholars believe that this story was intentionally omitted because it portrays Jesus offering too much mercy.

Let that (sink in) for a moment. Jesus offered too much mercy. He was soft on sin. He was liberal with his distribution of welcome, of forgiveness, and of hope. Can you see where some may be unwilling for Jesus to offer such a sinner as her a word of mercy and encouragement for her to live her life differently?

So, let's set the (scene.) It is sunrise in Jerusalem. It could have been in late August, so it was the coolest part of the day. Jesus goes to the temple, where John has told us he teaches those who would listen. His was a message of hope in a dismal world, light in the midst of political corruption and darkness, truth in a world where everyone twists the truth to suit their own ends. Later in this chapter, Jesus will (say) "you shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free."

The crowd at the Temple was the largest of the day. Jesus teaches his followers when his class is interrupted by (four) angry men. They threw a heap of embarrassed, quivering flesh to the ground. She wept loudly, and frantically tried to (cover) her naked body with the small outer cloak she had grabbed.

You can imagine the people in Jesus' class both shocked, and trying to catch a peek at her nakedness like teenagers would do.

("This) woman...." the angriest of the men seethed...."was caught in adultery!" In fact, these four men who had dragged her to the temple were eye-witnesses to the act. They had to be. The law of Moses was clear. Adultery, sex with someone not your spouse, had to have eye witnesses. Rumors or accusations were not enough. One would need to catch the guilty in the act, and here she is....for the most part naked before God.

"This woman...." the words were squeezed between clenched teeth.... "deserves death." Yes, he's right. The Law of Moses was clear. To keep peace in a very closely confined community, adulterers would need to die, both of them. So, where was the man? He would need to die, too.

(At the) stoning lot there were piles of baseball sized rocks. The accusers would surround the guilty. The plaintiff would be the first to throw a stone. In this case, the eye-witnesses would be first. Oh, and their righteous indignation was thick that morning! ("I've got) my stone to throw!" laughed the youngest of the four.

John (tells us) that Jesus stooped down, and with his finger wrote in the sand. What did he write? (Was) it the name of the man caught in the act? (Was) it the names of the women these men were carrying on affairs with, which everyone knew....though they denied. (Was) Jesus writing their sins: pride, egotism, hatred, judgment, hypocrisy? Or, he may (have) just been doodling....organizing his thoughts.

Remember, in John's Gospel, (Jesus) is identified in the very beginning to be God in the flesh. The Pharisees drag this woman before God, in God's house, and demand God's judgment. Can you see that?

What is it about (people) that drives us to condemn others? What is it about us that (turns) our bathroom mirrors into self-flattering accessories declaring us to be the fairest of them all? What is it (about) religious hacks who claim an angry biblical authority....yet, exclude themselves from accusation and sin? It is not new, and it is not restricted.

Today's (reading) from Joshua comes at the end of the book. Joshua reminds the people of all that God has done for them, from before Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to the present. Now, they stand on the Promised Land....and Joshua reinforces that all of this is God's gift to us. Then comes the challenge: (throw) away your false gods, your personal securities, your allegiances....and serve the Lord. Three times he offers that call. (Now) remember 3 is the Hebrew number of completion. Each time the people say "far be it from us to serve other gods! We will serve the Lord." The third time the people proclaim that...Joshua writes it in stone!

(And) then says, "choose this day"....(as for) me and my house....we will serve the Lord. The clearest creed in the Old Testament is given to us. As for me....I claim the actions of my heart....I will serve the Lord! My family will be led by my witness to serve the Lord.

Joshua then (says,) "um, I don't think you can do that. I know you." But, we can! Trust us! Well, we are still trying, aren't we?

Did the Pharisees (make) that promise? Regularly! As for me and my house, and this morning as the (nearly) naked woman cowers on the ground they are, in their own minds, righteous, faithful, and serving the Lord. What could be better?

Well, Jesus shows us, and John challenges us. (Justified) in their accusations the men pick up their stones. Jesus' silence until now seemed to affirm their accusations. Did Jesus say the woman sinned? Yes. There is no squishy denial of sexual sin here. She messed up. So did the man who had been with her. But....then Jesus (glanced) at the angriest one.... You are without sin, aren't you? And you, I know you.....are you going to throw that stone? And you, I saw how you treated your wife at the market yesterday... And you, do I need to tell these people how you are.....

One by one, they dropped their stones. Judgment is not our calling, (nor) is it our right..... unless..... we, ourselves, are perfect. So, let me ask: (whose) stone are you still holding? What is their sin, and what makes you righteous to judge them?

While there are plenty of sins in this scene to go around, John's focus (rests) upon the accused, the trembling woman. Jesus spoke softly. Look around. Who is here to condemn you? No one....all have left. Now, you have received mercy.....go and sin no more. Amen.

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