

John 8:3-11

3 The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery; and making her stand before all of them, 4 they said to him, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. 5 Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" 6 They 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. 7 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" (NRSV).

At this point in the Scripture Jesus is in a very difficult position. He is in Jerusalem where there is a plot to kill him. The religious leaders sent the temple police out to arrest him but they failed to do so. Then Jesus left Jerusalem and went to the Mount of Olives. The next morning he went back to the temple in Jerusalem. All the people came to Jesus and he began to teach them.

The Scripture takes place while he is teaching in temple. This is a public area; they are out in the open where honor is at stake. Honor is very valuable in that culture. It means everything and follows strict social norms. Chapter 7 shows a public confrontation that is a challenge to honor. Jesus makes public accusations against the religious leaders. He brings their transgressions out in open. People notice the disparity that Jesus speaks out in the open while those that are against him are silent. The religious leaders want to stop him because his doctrine conflicts with theirs. He publicly reveals their transgressions which is a challenge to their honor. Furthermore his popularity is a threat. They can't find a way to undermine his authority, they can't stop him from teaching, and they can't erode his popularity. So, they struggle to try to find ways to trap him.

The scribes and the Pharisees bring in woman was caught in adultery and make her stand in front of everyone. They say "the law Moses commands us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" I will point out some very important facts. First of all this is obviously a trap. The law requires an eyewitness but they did not provide one. They were not interested in the law of Moses, the welfare of the woman, or even the interpretation that Jesus might offer. They are only interested in trapping Jesus and they are using the woman and the law as expendable objects to achieve their means. Take a look at law of Moses. **Leviticus 20:10** If a man commits adultery with the wife of his neighbor, both the adulterer and the adulteress shall be put to death. **Deuteronomy 22:22** If a man is caught lying with the wife of another man, both of them shall die, the man who lay with the woman as well as the woman (NRSV). The law is strictly patriarchal. It is all about the man (if a man commits adultery, if a man is caught lying with the wife) it is justice for the man. In this patriarchal society the woman is insignificant. It is all about the man. Notice that according to the law of Moses both the man and the woman are to be stoned to death but they only brought in the woman; they did not bring the man. They challenge Jesus on the law without following the law themselves. The law and the woman only serve as a means to trap Jesus so they can charge him; so they can maintain their power and political control.

Jesus had a twofold response. His initial response was non-verbal action. He wrote in the ground. This is important to notice because a non-verbal response is a form of communication. In a culture where a man's honor was everything, a challenge to honor required a counter challenge. Not responding to his opponents verbally was an act of refusal and disengagement and is interpreted as an insult to their honor. Well, the scribes and Pharisees could not accept this insult to their honor. So, they keep on questioning Jesus. Now since Jesus is in the public arena he has to provide an answer. But he does not answer their legal question because it is obviously a trap. Their legal question was planned and thought out so that no matter how he answered they could get him. If Jesus said "do not to stone her" he could be accused of going against the law of Moses. If Jesus said "stone her" he would get into trouble with the Romans because they did not allow the Jews to carry out death sentences. It would also contradict his preaching and could be revealed as hypocrisy, which was his charge against them. So, Jesus does not answer the question. Instead Jesus moves beyond the argument to the bigger issue of sin. What Jesus did is he called the scribes and the Pharisees to accountability for their actions.

Jesus is brilliant. He makes a valid point. He brings the law into the light of God's mercy. Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her. A new challenge to honor comes from Jesus. No one can throw the first stone because no one in audience was without sin. If anyone with sin throws the stone then it would violate the code of honor and that would be a disgrace. The person could be ostracized. The accusers were faced with a challenge that was beyond their ability to respond. Jesus outsmarts them with ease. One by one they turned around and left. Then Jesus is alone with the woman who was caught in adultery and no one is there to condemn her. He says "Go your way, and from now on do not sin again."

The contemporary lesson for us is in the words that Jesus said. Jesus does not condemn the sin. Jesus does not punish the sinner. Jesus rehabilitated the woman. His instruction to her is "from now on do not sin again." It is not a matter of punishment; it is a matter of rehabilitation. Jesus is a rehabilitator. Jesus wants what is best for the other person. Jesus could have made an issue of their flawed strategy but Jesus points out a much bigger flaw. There is a flaw in all of the people. All people have sinned. All people deserve to be punished.

Now we get to the blessing - the Good News. God, the almighty creator, could punish all sinners. But God, out of love, chose not to punish all the people. Instead God gives the people a tremendous gift, the best gift we will ever receive, the gift of salvation. This gift of love is the best gift God has to give. The sinner is allowed to repent, change, and be rehabilitated by Jesus with the love of God.