

Who Among You...?

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Psalm 32:1-5

John 8:1-11

She was hauled out into the city streets. Surprised, scared, most likely naked, and brought before Jesus. Lots of people surrounded our lord – some standing perhaps some of them sitting on the ground. I imagine Jesus in the middle of them – addressing each of them, and all of them, as he walked his way around and through the crowd.

Until their attention was broken with a disturbance of some sort – men's angry voices, a woman crying pleading – all coming closer...now the crowd was pushed and jostled until standing there by Jesus in front of God and everyone... The woman ... accused of being caught in the very act of adultery. Some in the town may have known her – maybe she had a reputation...but maybe not, maybe she was just one of them – a neighbor, an acquaintance, the woman who smiled at them at the market or by the well, or maybe they knew her from worshiping at the Temple.

But now in Hester Prinn fashion – everyone knew who she was..what she did.. and everyone could now click their tongues, and whisper behind her back, or pull their children away from her as they passed on the streets, and guaranteed that from now on= the women in town would definitely watch their husbands more closely. All this without knowing the full story. All this without asking one question – just assuming, just having an opinion, just making a judgment. All of them ready to accuse....ready to stone her to death.

The Jewish law that the scribes and Pharisees used against her stated that stoning was the punishment for adultery – but not just for the woman – but for the man as well – except he wasn't standing there in his birthday suit in front of half the city – only her.

And what was Jesus doing, but writing in the dirt with his finger. Everyone wonders what he wrote, but that's not important. What is important – is that in Jesus time, purposely pretending to be engrossed in writing something – sent an unmistakable message = it was a cultural thing and everyone understood it. Like walking away and closing a door behind you, the message was -- I choose not to get involved in this mess. By writing in the dirt, Jesus made it clear that he would not be challenged, or bullied...that he was not foolish enough to take the bait, or get drawn into the drama that the Pharisees were trying to stir up. But scripture reads that the scribes and

Pharisees would not let up - they continued to press the issue. And all the while, Jesus continued to write in the dirt.

And I guess when Jesus had just about enough, he paused, drew himself up to his full height, looked into every accusing face, and with the kind of love that only Jesus could muster – quietly asked the question... *Who among you...is without sin? Whoever that is???* *Let that one come forward, and be the first to throw your stone.* And the best part, is that right after Jesus said that- he bent down and started to write in the dirt all over again. Thereby, dismissing them without another word.

Oh what a mumbling grumbling and then very silent crowd that must have been. As they walked away, what Jesus and the woman heard, was the thud of stones being dropped from guilty hands.

On Ash Wednesday each one was given a stone to hold during the service, to pray over, and to place at the foot of the cross. Prayers may have been for ourselves, our loved ones...may have been for a situation or clarity to make a decision...for the church or for the people of this world.

But on this first Sunday of Lent, I want us to think about the stones that were held in the hands of the crowd that surrounded the woman. Those hate-filled stones. I want us to think of those sweaty palms rolling that stone around in their hands, perhaps walking to a different spot to get a better shot at her...those stones in those hands just itching, just waiting for their opportunity to aim and throw, and perhaps land the final deadly blow.

We are human- we have all been hurt, all been fooled, lied to, and misled. We have all suffered at the hands of people who never had our best interest at heart. We have all believed what we were told only to find out that none of it was true. We have all lost people we dearly loved, and felt helpless when we knew there was nothing left to do. Not a one comes out of this life unscathed. And understanding that – boy oh boy – we all walk around holding on to the stones of hurt and resentment, betrayal and jealousy, and lost hope.

There's a great scene in the movie *The Mission*. Robert Dinero plays a 18th century slave trader and mercenary who has come to faith and seeks redemption. He joins a Jesuit priest in a remote part of South America. The indigenous tribe who have been converted by the priest live beyond a great water fall – and the only way to get to them is to climb this water fall. The repentant Deniro has a huge netted bag of the swords he used, the armor he wore – Which he insists on carrying with him – through rivers, and mountains, and jungle and humongous waterfalls. He will not be deterred he is

insistent on dragging this with him for hundreds of miles and all on foot. Symbolically Deniro insists on carrying this burden of his past sins, and misery and regrets...when he finally reaches his destination a young native boy sees his distress and cuts the thick rope that was tied around Dinero's neck and at last the life of anger and remorse and regret, that bag filled with Dinero's past-- went crashing down the mountain, splashed into the river below and floated away.

A bit dramatic perhaps, but that is how I see these stones we carry with – anger regret sadness betrayal jealousy – whatever our stones may be – we carry them and carry them – and that burden is not what Christ wants us to carry with us any longer.

I want to believe that this is a part of what Lent is about. Ruminant about those bad things that happened to us all we want, carry those stones for as long as we need, but this season of Lent is a time to let these things go. Lent is a gift of time = in which we can finally release the burdens, finally be free from the stuff that keep us locked into the past.

Who condemns us – most often we condemn ourselves – and more than once. This Lent I want us to hear Jesus' exchange with this woman very plainly. Who condemns you? NO one, Lord. Neither do I. Amen