

Trapped

1. Warm up: Jeff began Sunday's sermon by sharing a couple of his pet peeves, *i.e.*, decorative rocks as yard art and crooked utility boxes. What's one of your pet peeves?
2. Although we all have pet peeves, it never occurs to us to consider what things we might do that become the pet peeves of those around us. Our typical human lack of self-awareness can be staggering. We're always very aware of what others do to annoy us, but often oblivious to what we do to annoy others. This week's Gospel story illustrates how easy it is for us to fall into this trap spiritually. We easily see the sins of others, while often being oblivious to our own sins, which puts us in a very dangerous place. Read John 8:1-11, as printed on p. 3.
 - a. When the Pharisees burst into the outer court of the temple, creating all kinds of commotion, disrupting Jesus' teachings, forcing the adulteress woman to stand in front of everyone, what do you think people in the crowd were feeling? What do you think the adulterous woman was feeling?
 - b. Have you ever witnessed someone being publically shamed in a church, workplace, family, or elsewhere? What happened? How did that affect you?
 - c. Why do religious people often seem to feel the need for public shaming?
 - d. The Pharisees presented Jesus with a dilemma. He could either choose to enforce the scriptural command for the woman to be stoned or he could blatantly refuse to obey the scriptural command. If you were faced with the same a choice, ***and if you had to choose one of those two options***, which would you choose and why?
 - e. Jesus surprised the Pharisees with his brilliant response. In some of the most famous words ever uttered, he said, "Let the one among you who is without sin cast the first stone." What do you think that means? What point was Jesus making?
 - f. After Jesus made his famous statement, the text says, "Once again he bent down and wrote on the ground *the sins of each of them.*" The italicized words appear only in certain ancient, but raise an interesting question. What might have been the words Jesus wrote?
3. By his actions, Jesus was calling the Pharisees to self-awareness. We humans – whether we're religious or not – get so hyper-focused on the sins of others – the things others do that make us nuts – and we get so hyper-focused on judging them that we hardly ever get around to examining ourselves. The sin of the woman in our story was obvious – adultery. But the sin of her accusers was even graver. They were trying to entrap Jesus, so as to arrest and execute him, as a way of protecting their religious turf. And the adulterous woman was just a pawn in their callous scheme. Basically, the Pharisees were acting like religious mob bosses who would do anything to protect their territory. As

such, the Pharisees were guilty of a sin much greater than adultery, *i.e.*, attempted murder. And we shake our heads in disgust, but in so doing, we completely miss the point of the story. WE ARE ALL GUILTY OF GRAVE SIN. “Let the one without sin cast the first stone.”

- a. Jeff contended that we’re all essentially guilty of negligent homicide. If it only takes \$30 to feed a starving child for a year, but we waste \$30 on something frivolous for ourselves instead of donating that money to save a child, that means we too have blood on our hands. What do you think of that argument? Is it fair? How does it make you feel?
 - b. Do you buy the idea that – one way or another – we’re all guilty of grave sin? Why or why not?
 - c. Jeff shared a terrible thing he once did when he used careless words that implied to a group of blind kids that they weren’t “normal.” He described how painful it was to have to admit to himself what he did. Tell us about a time in your life when you did something you profoundly regret? Why is it so important to be able to face the pain of owning our stuff?
4. From all of this, Jeff suggested we learn a key lesson: The people around us are deeply flawed, but so are we. Growth begins with honest self-awareness of the magnitude of our own shortcomings. So let’s stop judging others and work on ourselves. But once we own our stuff, it’s incredibly important that we know what to do with that stuff. In our Gospel story Jesus shows us. He refused to condemn either the adulterous woman or the murderous Pharisees. Instead he chose to show them grace and offer them the chance to learn from their failure and make a new beginning. That then puts the ball back in their court. Grace allowed them (and us) to choose whether to stay stuck or learn from our failures.
- a. Tell us about a time when you (or someone you know) got stuck in a recurring pattern of failure. What happened? What kept you (or them) stuck? And how did that stuckness affect you (or them)?
 - b. Read the three additional Bible verses that appear on p. 3 after the Gospel story. Sum up the verses in your own words. What’s the message you draw from them?
 - c. Why is it so hard to accept God’s grace and truly believe God doesn’t condemn us?
 - d. Tell us about a time when you (or someone you know) failed terribly, but owned your (their) failure, learned from it, accepted God’s grace, and chose to make a new beginning? What happened? What got you (or them) unstuck? And how did that new beginning affect you (or them)?

John 8:1-11

¹while Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. ²Early in the morning he came again to the temple. All the people came to him and he sat down and began to teach them. ³The 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. ⁷When 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.’ ⁸And once again he bent down and wrote on the ground.^a ⁹When they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the elders; and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him.

¹⁰Jesus straightened up and said to her, ‘Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?’ ¹¹She said, ‘No one, sir.’^b And Jesus said, ‘Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again.’

Supplemental Verses Related to Question 4b

Romans 8:1

“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”

Romans 8:38

“For I am convinced that . . . [there isn’t] anything . . . in all creation . . . able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Lamentations 3:22

“The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases. God’s mercies never end. They are new every morning.”