

Caught In The Very Act

On Sunday we looked at a dramatic encounter between Jesus, the Pharisees, and a woman accused of adultery.

1. Warm-up Question: Our Gospel story says the woman was “caught in the very act.” Those are some of the most frightening words in the English language – “caught in the act.” Tell us about a time when, as a kid, you got caught doing something bad.
2. Read John 8:2-11, as printed on p. 3.
 - a. The text doesn’t tell us anything about the woman’s demeanor as the Pharisees dragged her into the temple. Nor does it describe how she felt. But we can imagine. Have you ever been publically shamed – in church, at work, in your family? How did that feel? How did you react?
 - b. Verse 3 says the Pharisees made the woman stand in front all the people as her sin was proclaimed. What’s the point in public shaming and punishment? What motivates the advocates? What do they think they’re accomplishing?
 - c. The Pharisees loved religious rules; therefore, they hated those who flouted religious rules. Psalm 139:21 captures the sentiment: “Do I not hate those who hate you, O Lord? Do I not loathe those who rise up against you? I hate them with perfect hatred; I count them my enemies.” Have you ever known someone who had this attitude? How did it affect them? Is it right to hate those who hate God? If not, what point should we draw from this verse?
 - d. Jeff told how the church where he grew up ostracized and vilified a teenage girl who got pregnant. In your church past, have you ever witnessed anything that reminds you of the religious shaming described in our Gospel story? How did what you witnessed affect your own faith journey?
3. When we witness fundamentalist religious expressions of “righteous indignation,” it’s easy to see how toxic and terrible it is, and we can easily distance ourselves from it by saying, “Thank God, I am not like the Pharisees. I would never treat an offender the way they treated that woman.” But the truth is, from time to time we all find ourselves in situations where somebody does something so hurtful or offensive to us that our attitude is, “You are dead to me! I hope you get what you deserve! Don’t you ever come looking for mercy from me. I hate you with a perfect hatred!” By way of example, Jeff described the reaction of a son when approached by the father who deserted him, as portrayed in the movie *With Honors*. The son was so hurt, he refused to forgive his father and instead treated him with contempt. Take the following questions as a group, and have a few different people respond.
 - a. Who in your life hurt you really bad? What did they do?

- b. Given what they did, what do they deserve?
 - c. Do you wish they'd get what they deserve? Why or why not?
 - d. How have your feelings toward them affected you?
4. In our Gospel story, the Pharisees wanted Jesus to authorize the woman to receive the prescribed Old Testament death penalty for adultery.
- a. Verse 6 says Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. What might he have written? What are some possibilities?
 - b. In Matthew 7:1, Jesus said, "Judge not that you be not judged. For with the same judgment you judge you will be judged." What do you think that means?
 - c. As the Pharisees persisted in demanding an answer, Jesus eventually stood up, looked them in the eye, and said, "Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." What was Jesus' point?
 - d. Tell us about one of the worst things you've ever done. How do you hope God and others will judge you for that?
 - e. If we refuse to show grace to those who sin against us, will God show grace to us?
5. After all her accusers walked away, "Jesus was left alone with the woman." He said, "Neither do I condemn you."
- a. Have you ever experienced a situation where you did something terrible, but the person you wronged refused to condemn you and instead showed you grace? How did that make you feel?
 - b. Jesus told the woman, "Go on your way, and from now on do not sin again." Jeff said these words "indicate that, in the eyes of Jesus, our sins are not about the past, they're about the future. It's not about punishment; it's about learning and growing and doing better." Think again about the terrible thing you described in Question 5.a. Have you allowed that experience to make you better? If so, how?
 - c. Jeff said, "There is nothing in this world that makes us want to do better, no force in this world that is more transformational, than when our brokenness is met with grace." Do you agree or disagree – and why? Why is grace so powerful?
 - d. If we hate others when they sin against us, it becomes really hard not to hate ourselves when we sin against others. Our righteous indignation boomerangs on us. When you sin, are you able to receive God's grace and feel God's love for you? Have you been able to let go of, and rise above, your worst moral failures in life? If not, how can we get better at that?

- e. Have you been able to let go of, and rise above, the worst things people have done to you in your life? If not, how can we get better at that?

John 8:2-11

²Early in the morning Jesus 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.

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." And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again."