

# Forgiveness

## Thud

Frankton – 8/9/15

Scripture: John 8.1-11 adulteress caught in the act

Proposition: We can't cast the first stone because we have all sinned.

The early morning sun stretches a golden blanket across the streets of the city. Jesus is surrounded by a horseshoe of listeners. Each for their own reason, they arose early to come and hear him speak. As he speaks, some are cautious, wanting to believe yet they are wary of this one whose claims stretch the boundaries of their belief. Others are convinced, and nod their heads in agreement and open their hearts in obedience. They have accepted Jesus as their teacher and are learning to accept him as their Lord. Still others in the crowd are conniving. They are there so that they could watch his every move. Oh, not so they could sort out whether to believe or not, but so that they could trap him in some theological conundrum. Whether those listening are cautious, convinced, or conniving, they all listen keenly.

We don't know the topic of his words that morning. Whatever the topic was, his talk was soon interrupted when some folks burst into the courtyard. In a determined fashion, they erupt out of a narrow street and stomp toward Jesus. His listeners scramble to get out of the way. The mob heading towards him is made up of religious leaders; Ad Council chairs, Trustees, Finance Team members, Tenderloin Dinner team people. Respected men. Important men. But then there is the one woman in the mob. One scantily clad woman who is struggling to keep her balance on the crest of this angry wave.

You see, only moments before, she had been in bed with a man who was not her husband. Maybe her husband was gone. Maybe this was a normal routine. Maybe this was how she made her living. We don't know. But we do know that the bedroom door was jerked open and she was yanked from the bed. She barely had time to cover her body before she was dragged into the street. Can you imagine what thoughts raced through her mind as she scrambled to keep her feet? She knew the law. She knew what it said: the punishment for adultery was death by stoning. They arrive where Jesus is, ignoring Jesus' listeners who have parted the way to allow the mob closeness to Jesus. At this point the leader of the mob, dressed in holy, religious vestments of the day, takes over. "Teacher," his voice sneers. [SLIDE] *This woman was caught in the very act of adultery!* [4]

Three things I want to mention. 1) "Caught in the very act of adultery." The words alone are enough to make you blush. Doors jerked open. Covers pulled back. "In the act." In the arms. Caught. "AHA!" 2) According to the law, adultery was punishable by death, but only if two people were eye-witnesses to the act. Question: how likely are two people to be eye-witnesses to adultery, to catch somebody "in the act."? Answer: very unlikely. And if two people do witness the "very act," odds are it's not a coincidence – it's a set-up. 3) The Law says anyone caught in the act is to be stoned. That would include both parties. So, what about the man that this woman was "caught in the very act" with? What happened to him? Could it be that while the religious leaders were getting her they missed him? The evidence leaves little doubt. It was a trap. They

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didn't want him; they wanted her. They didn't even really want her; but they needed to trap her in order to trap Jesus.

So now this accused woman finds herself in between the angry mob and Jesus. She stares first at the ground. And then she sees the stones. The stones they have in their hands. The ones they will use to stone her. These are stones of the righteous intended to stone the lust and the life out of her. The men squeeze them so tightly that their fingertips are white. The Pharisee continues talking to Jesus about the woman "caught" in adultery. He says: [SLIDE] *The Law of Moses says to stone her. What do you say?* [5] Emphasis on the you. The trap is now set. They have put Jesus in a catch-22 position. Let me explain. If Jesus says to stone the woman that would go against his teachings of love and compassion and forgiveness and the crowd might turn against him. If he said to let her go, then he was acting outside of Moses' Law and the Pharisees could discredit him. Either way, the Pharisees would win and Jesus would lose.

So what does Jesus do? (I know that you know, but pretend for a moment that you don't know and feel the surprise all over again.) [SLIDE] He doesn't say a word, but stoops and writes in the sand. I find it really interesting that this is the only place in the Bible where it says Jesus writes something. I find it more interesting that in the only place Jesus is said to have written, it doesn't tell us what he wrote. We don't know what he wrote. That hasn't stopped a lot for people from conjecturing about what he wrote. Many scholars and theologians feel that Jesus started writing in the dirt the sins of the mob that brought the woman to him. I can see Jesus doing that. I can see him writing their sins in the sand, after all he knew these men, and he knew their sins. Cotah, coveting. Fatah, failing to honor your parents. Itzak, illegal business deals. Selah, stealing. Timka, taking advantage of the poor around you. Uriah, using God's name in vain.

And I can see what affect it would have on the mob. Put yourself in their place and imagine seeing Jesus write down your sins. Alice, gossiping. Carol, greed. Earl, laziness. Jane, pride. Lance, unfaithfulness to your wife. Jim, worshipping another god: money. What if Jesus made a list of your sins while you watched him write them down? I'm thinking that would tend to take that righteous feeling right out of you, wouldn't it?

Simply put: we don't know what Jesus wrote in the sand. And I think there is a very good reason for that. You see, I don't think that what he wrote in the sand was nearly as important as what he eventually spoke with his lips. I say that because what he says was recorded for us to know. As Jesus writes, he speaks to the mob of Pharisees: (and this is my unauthorized translation) "I suppose, if any of you have never made a mistake, you have the right to stone this woman. Those of you who are perfect in every way, go ahead, you can be first. There she is, just standing there. She's an easy target to hit. If you can claim to be perfect and can back it up, go ahead, throw your stone. [SLIDE] If you haven't sinned, go ahead, throw your stone." After Jesus speaks his peace, he returns to his writing in the dirt. And the courtyard walls which just a few minutes ago were filled with loud talk and loud accusations and the bustling of the crowd, now echo just silence for a few moments. And as they say, the silence was deafening.

Until this sound is heard: THUD! – the sound of a thudding rock. One by one, the mob sees that Jesus has eluded their trap again. They know they can't claim to be mistake-free, sinless, much as we can't claim to be mistake-free, sinless. The first sound heard in the courtyard is the sound of a thudding rock. THUD! Then another rock. THUD! Then a few more stones are dropped. THUD!

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THUD! THUD! Then finally several fall to the ground. THUD! THUD! THUD! THUD! THUD! THUD! The next sound heard in the courtyard is the sound of sandals shuffling away in the dust. All the would-be stone-throwers turned and left.

When all her accusers have gone, and it was just this woman and Jesus left, Jesus did not let her off the hook. [SLIDE] He told her: Go and sin no more. [11b] In other words, Jesus told her what she did was wrong and she needed to change her ways. I think that is one of the things Jesus would want us to take away from this episode. When we do something wrong, we need to change our ways.

But I think the bigger moral of the story is Jesus telling the mob, [SLIDE] “If you haven’t sinned, go ahead, throw your stone.” He tells us that unless we can claim to be perfect, and back it up, we need to hold onto our stones. So if being sinless is the qualification for throwing stones, how many of you are qualified to throw your stone? Let me see your hands. Get them up in the air. I’m glad to see none of you are willing to say that you’re qualified to throw your stone.

Now, let me ask something different: How many of you, even though by your own admission were unqualified to throw stones, have thrown your stone anyway? How many of you have shot someone else down even though you’ve made mistakes too, maybe even the same mistake you stoned someone else for? How many of you have been part of the angry, stone-throwing mob, even though you knew you were guilty as well? Probably all of us can raise our hands now, for we have all thrown our stone knowing good and well that we shouldn’t because we couldn’t live up to the standard that Jesus set for stone-throwers: perfection, mistake-free, sinless.

Oh, we’ve all had our reasons for throwing our stones. The person we threw the stone at had done something to us. They took something from us. They made disparaging remarks about us. They beat us to the promotion. They got better grades in school. They make more money. They’re more handsome or more beautiful. They have a better spouse or even just have a spouse. Their kids never cause them any trouble or they just have kids. They live in a bigger house and have a BMW 328i white convertible sitting in their driveway. They take fancier vacations. **OR**, maybe they’ve done something terrible to someone terribly close to us. Maybe, just maybe, it’s just that they different from you: their skin is different, they’re not from around here, they speak with an accent, they need a wheelchair to get around, they are too short, too tall, too fat, too skinny, too bald, hair’s too long, they smoke, they drink, their clothes are always dirty and unkempt, they’re on trial or in prison. Remember, the condition or situation of the one we are throwing stones at doesn’t qualify us to throw stones. We’ve had our reasons, but in reality, we’ve all thrown stones when we haven’t been qualified to throw stones. Remember, the condition or situation of the one we are throwing stones at doesn’t qualify us to throw stones.

When Jesus talked to the mob in the courtyard that morning he was talking to us this morning. He was setting the standard for judging and condemning people. It’s a pretty high standard; in fact, it’s a standard we cannot live up to. And Jesus knows that. He knows we’ll never be qualified to throw our stone. So, Jesus would rather we not spend our time throwing stones that we know we are not qualified to throw. He would rather we spend our time doing what he did: [SLIDE] sharing the gospel, changing lives, building God’s community. What are you going to do? Are you going to continue to throw your stones? Or are you going to Build God’s Community? I hope you Build

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God's Community. But you have to let go of your stones. So we're going to practice that...(Give rocks to everyone and have them 'thud' the rocks.)