

## ***What shall we do with our stones?***

John 8: 2- 11

This text about a woman caught in adultery was allegedly not found in the Johannine narrative prior to 1611. Ironically, it is believed to be an original Jesus narrative, but perhaps incorporated at this juncture to underscore the persistence of the Scribes and Pharisees in questioning Jesus's divinity.

That notwithstanding, the story begs a few questions -

Who caught her, one man or the entire community? How? Was she set up? Where was her husband? Where was her lover? Wasn't the husband embarrassed at his wife's exposure and its implications for his sexual prowess? And, according to Leviticus 20.10, BOTH adulterous parties ought to be stoned/punished; so how then was a woman caught in adultery BY herself?

Aside from the misfortune of being caught, the woman was dragged (possibly half-dressed) into the synagogue on display before the gathering and more so, to test Jesus. But Jesus was known for his penchant for extended grace. Healing the sick on the Sabbath, eating with publicans and riff raff, allowing questionable women to touch his person. Jesus's detractors knew that in the law, adultery equals death by stoning, and Christ was grace-incarnate - offering life through God's Spirit.

Now here's the twist. Jesus's initial response was to write in the sand. There are only two other references of God writing, and both related to divine Law and judgement. Certainly the Johannine writer knew that the intended readership would have recalled both incidents. Reference to Jesus' writing was therefore significant. It underscored His divinity and implied a profound epiphany for all followers of God.

Now, the woman OBVIOUSLY violated one of the 613 commandments. That was enough cause for God to break the stone tablets. This was the detractors' definitive proof that Jesus was a charlatan. Their seemingly pious behaviour hid ulterior motives.

But, let's not forget the second move of God's hand - writing on the Babylonian palace wall, "Mene, Mene Tekel Upharsin ... you've been weighed in the balance and found wanting." Or in more contemporary language, "If you are sinless, throw the stone." Law interpolated by grace.

Let's fast forward a few centuries, where sexual sin is not officially punished by death, but abuse of women is still justified by many, and rooted in biblical law. Again, it is the motive to judge which is devoid of grace or mercy.

What is God's call for grace? Throw the stones - PROVIDING we are sinless, providing we have fully established sexual and other sins. Let's also include the cases of oppression - wife-beating for (alleged) adultery, insubordination, or just because one can. Or, venerating mother Mary's selfless devotion, how we exclude teen/single mothers from worship, while the consenting, non-absentee, sperm donor goes unpunished.

God's grace is continually sacrificed at the altar of self righteousness.

Nevertheless ... our God still writes on the sands of time. God's grace continuously interrupts legalistic abuse; moving beyond our sinfulness, inviting us to sin less, wholly conscious that none of us are sinless.

And that's why we observe 16 Days of Activism and Thursdays in Black and pilgrimages of justice and peace. For God invites us to turn swords into ploughshares, stones of abuse into bridges of compassion, healing and reconciliation; not ignoring the sin, but reflecting God's justice through the grace which saves in Christ Jesus. That is salvation's truth -

We are ...

... Saved by grace ... to extend God's grace ... to another bound by law in a unjust and violent world.

Stone-throwing or bridge-building - what shall we do with our stones?

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