

**03.22.26 ~ 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Lent**  
**“Condemnation or Mercy?”**  
The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA

**Words to Ponder**

**John 8:1-8** <sup>NLT</sup>

Pew Bible 931

*A Woman Caught in Adultery*

<sup>1</sup> Jesus returned to the Mount of Olives, <sup>2</sup> but early the next morning he was back again at the Temple. A crowd soon gathered, and he sat down and taught them. <sup>3</sup> As he was speaking, the teachers of religious law and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in the act of adultery. They put her in front of the crowd.

<sup>4</sup> “Teacher,” they said to Jesus, “this woman was caught in the act of adultery. <sup>5</sup> The law of Moses says to stone her. What do you say?”

<sup>6</sup> They were trying to trap him into saying something they could use against him, but Jesus stooped down and wrote in the dust with his finger. <sup>7</sup> They kept demanding an answer, so he stood up again and said, “All right, but let the one who has never sinned throw the first stone!” <sup>8</sup> Then he stooped down again and wrote in the dust.

**Leader: These Are the Words of Jesus.**

**People: Thanks be to God!**

**Words of Mercy**

**John 8:9-12, 17-20** <sup>NLT</sup>

Pew Bible 931-33

<sup>9</sup> When the accusers heard this, they slipped away one by one, beginning with the oldest, until only Jesus was left in the middle of the crowd with the woman. <sup>10</sup> Then Jesus stood up again and said to the woman, “Where are your accusers? Didn’t even one of them condemn you?”

<sup>11</sup> “No, Lord,” she said.

And Jesus said, “Neither do I. Go and sin no more.”

<sup>12</sup> Jesus spoke to the people once more and said, “I am the light of the world. If you follow me, you won’t have to walk in darkness, because you will have the light that leads to life.” . . .

<sup>17</sup> Your own law says that if two people agree about something, their witness is accepted as fact. <sup>18</sup> I am one witness, and my Father who sent me is the other.”

<sup>19</sup> “Where is your father?” they asked.

Jesus answered, “Since you don’t know who I am, you don’t know who my Father is. If you knew me, you would also know my Father.” <sup>20</sup> Jesus made these statements while he was teaching in the section of the Temple known as the Treasury. But he was not arrested, because his time had not yet come.

Leader: These Are Jesus’ Words of Truth.

**People: Thanks be to God!**

**Please pray with me:**

Dear Lord, we come again this morning to be in your presence through worship, prayer, music, and your word. Thank you for the ability and freedom to gather in fellowship and study. On this fifth Sunday of Lent, we confess our own sin and ask

for merciful judgment and stronger faith. As we remember your ministry and teachings in these unsettled times, let us forgive others as you forgive us. Clarify these words and illuminate Jesus' actions to prepare us for the next two weeks leading you to the cross. Embolden us to share our faith with others who don't know you and please speak through this message and messenger. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

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Can you believe that next week is already Palm Sunday? I invite you to begin your Easter celebration with us next Sunday and sign up for the Good Friday "Disciples' Lunch" with the Lord's Supper (recognizing Maundy Thursday), and our annual Contemplative service of Scripture, Singing, and Prayer in the Fellowship Hall at noon on Friday. Then we'll regather Resurrection Sunday at our normal Hymn Study and Worship times. During this last week of Lent, may we be diligent to spend time in prayer and study, following Christ and his disciples toward the cross and the tomb.

In Chapter 7 of the Gospel of John, we see Jesus ministering all around Galilee. He did not dare to go into Jerusalem because a few Pharisee leaders were conspiring to stop him from instructing the people; there were rumors they were plotting to kill him. But the Feast of Tabernacles was happening, so Jesus decided to go to the temple. The Feast of Tabernacles, also called the Feast of *Sukkot* (Booths), is a seven-day biblical festival (plus an eighth day) in the seventh Hebrew month, celebrating God's provision, protection, and faithfulness during the 40-year wilderness wanderings. Israelites built temporary shelters like huts or booths to remember their journey from Egypt.

The beloved story of the woman who committed adultery we read in Chapter 8 was a later addition around AD 900. Almost all scholars agree

these verses were not part of the original Gospel of John manuscript and canon because the style and vocabulary differ substantially from the rest of his Gospel. In the NIV, you'll see it in italics or brackets to show it was added later as an important part of the oral tradition by copyists, but John is the only place for this story in most translations. Bible Gateway notes that a few manuscripts include these verses, wholly or in part after John 7:36, John 21:25, Luke 21:38 or Luke 24:53. The story is not in Matthew or Mark.

Until now, we have seen how Jesus' ministry has shed light on his relationship with God, his powers to heal, and the likelihood that he is more than a prophet and may be the Messiah. The more he teaches and the more followers who come to believe, as we saw the last two weeks, he is putting himself in conflict with temple authorities. This situation is a response to trap Jesus into revealing his opposition to the laws of Moses and to justify his arrest. In the story, the woman who may have been married was caught in adultery. According to the law, there had to be two witnesses to confirm the guilty party (note that only the woman was being judged, not the man). The purpose of bringing her to Jesus in front of a crowd was to discredit him as a teacher. We are not sure exactly what he wrote on the ground; some scholars suggest he was writing the sins of the accusers! More likely he was thinking and pausing, giving others time to examine their own consciences. Jesus' words of warning, ". . . let the one who has never sinned throw the first stone" convicted his hearers, so the men in authority were disturbed and walked away. With mercy for the woman and condemnation for her accusers, Jesus spoke these words of compassion, "Where are your accusers [*now*]? Didn't even one of them condemn

you?’<sup>11</sup> ‘No, Lord,’ she said. And Jesus said, ‘Neither do I. Go and sin no more.’” His mercy gave her great hope and motivation to do better!

Although our faith stories and history focus on the adulteress as a lesson to sin no more, Jesus, to me, seems more concerned with her accusers and gives them a stark reflection to consider. I think both can be true; perhaps Jesus was giving his own accusers another chance to repent and be in relationship with God the Father. After all, he did forgive his judges on the cross.

This question of condemnation or mercy has been sitting with me for recent weeks; who are we to judge others about their sin? Who gives us authority to **judge** or even authority to **forgive**? Jesus gives us this **model** of forgiveness. I hope that during Lent, we have been asking ourselves comparable questions and taking a temperature of our own anger and resentments about whatever is bothering us and keeping us from Jesus’ love and mercy. Who are we in our faith, the condemned or the forgiven? Where are we in our faith—lost or assured? Where are we in our relationship with Jesus—intellectual or dependent? Do we falsely accuse others before we look inward to see what is our part in that unkind word that slipped from our lips? Or those discordant opinions so loudly expressed? Are we believers about unity or division? None of the woman’s accusers were innocent, and neither are we all innocent or perfect in our thinking. Do you jump to false conclusions, or do you lead your life and relationships with compassion first? I found it interesting that this important teaching took place in the Temple Treasury which was basically the place where an offering box stood, much like our white column. Can you see Jesus standing there challenging the leaders in this

way? Can you imagine Jesus at other white columns in our city, challenging the judgments of our leaders?

In the next section from verses 12-20 which was in the original manuscripts, Jesus speaks clearly to the people unsettling their view of who their leaders are—the temple or God. He begins to reveal more about his Messiahship. He uses their own laws of requiring two witnesses to help them understand that he and God are the two witnesses in the case they just saw and in their own sin judgments. Jesus is the light that will bring justice, compassion, and mercy to a judgmental world of power, greed, and empire.

In antiquity, light was considered a substance like water, fire, and air, so light was the essence of life. In the early 300's BC, Aristotle was an influential Greek philosopher who defined "substance" as matter and form, a simple unity, a being, so by saying that Jesus is Israel's light, Jesus states that he is the source of Israel's life and very substance. That was countercultural and revolutionary! For centuries, the church had heresies and conflicts over that meaning. How could God and Jesus be one substance? And later add in the Holy Spirit? Those are theological and ontological studies for another time. For our purposes and this story's, God and Jesus did not judge the woman, so why should other human beings? He repeats that he and the Father are one; one substance, one being, one light, one life-giving source! People may have a certain belief in him because of his physical appearance or reputation, but that is inadequate belief. <sup>19b</sup> "Since you don't know who I am, you don't know who my Father is. If you knew me, you would also know my Father." As I said from last week's Chapter 5, unity means that if one rejects the Son (like the temple

leaders did), they are rejecting the Father, that is, God . . . He was stating the truth of his very existence and incarnation, but they could not understand. His surety, confidence, and these teachings created the conflict that set the scene for persecution. The Son is the source and substance of life itself. Those who believe in him have eternal life, forgiveness, and mercy. But Jesus' fate is yet to be revealed. We will see you next week for Palm Sunday and let us seek holy discernment as we also walk toward the cross. Amen! ||

***Please pray with me:*** Dear Jesus, we love you. We thank you in advance for your sacrifice and ask you to inspire and enlighten us this week as we ponder our own sin and forgiveness. Let us remember that despite our busy lives and decisions, you alone are our source, substance, and light. Help us to be true witnesses of your grace, love, and mercy. Strengthen the roots of our faith; help us to share the light of Christ, letting him shine through us. May our spiritual practices be disciplined and transformative, while our focus be only upon you. We pray in the holy name of Jesus, Amen.